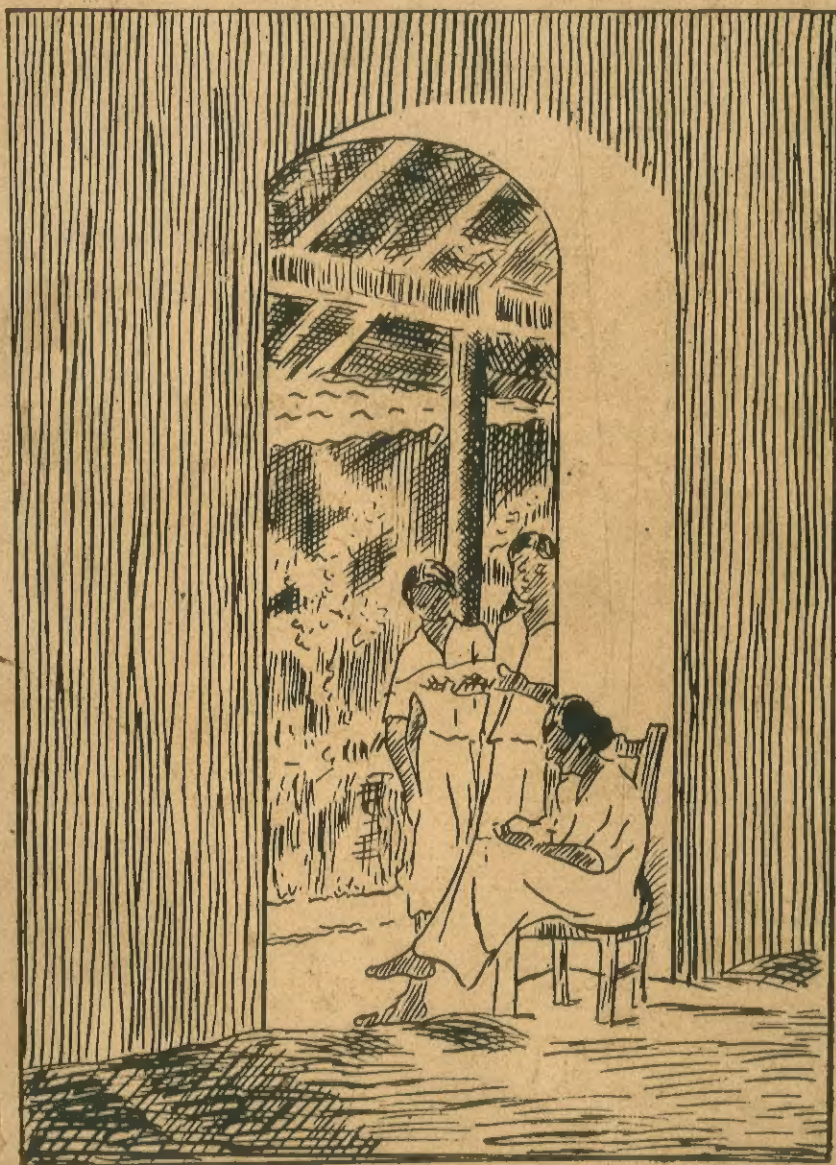


MY YEARS AT  
ALWAYE



HESTER SMITH



Thangamma Jacob  
from  
Hester Smith

# MY YEARS AT ALWAYE

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All proceeds from the sale of this book will be given to the  
CHRISTAVA MAHILALAYAM GOLDEN JUBILEE FUND



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## FOREWORD

A cousin of mine suggested to me that I should write some account of my years in India. Re-reading my diaries and the long letters I wrote to my mother, has brought back to my mind the happy and some of the difficult days I spent at Alwaye, and above all the recollection of the dear colleagues with whom I worked and of the children I taught.

As the Golden Jubilee of the Christava Mahilalayam Girls' High School will be celebrated in 1977, I hope this little book may be of interest to the Old Girls and to my fellow workers who will be especially remembering their days at the School on that occasion. It may also be of interest to some of my relations and to my English friends who have worked in India, and for that reason I have written about some matters which will be only too well known to my friends in Kerala.

This is a very personal record, as P. K. Matthew has written the detailed history of the School from the time when he and A. A. Paul began planning it in 1925 till 1971 when he retired after serving the School for over 45 years. To his book I am indebted for many facts. The two founders of the School both died in 1973.

I am grateful to Anna Joseph and to Thankamma Jacob who have written to me about their early days at the School and whose letters I have quoted, and also to Sosamma Daniel and to Achamma Mathen who have refreshed my mind about various details.

I thank Miss Oewerkerk for allowing me to read the typescript of a book she is writing about old Travancore and especially for her account of the Princely Family. During the period when I was Headmistress from 1929—1933 Travancore and Cochin were Native States with their own Maharajahs, and India was part of the British Empire. When I returned in 1947 to join the Group, India had become an Independent Republic. So I saw great changes.

I have been re-reading Bishop Leslie Brown's book "The Indian Christians of St. Thomas" and must thank him for answering my questions about them.

T. B. Thomas and Grace Thomas, while on a recent visit to me, most kindly read through all my typescript and made various useful suggestions. I am grateful to Eira Dalton for offering to proof-read the book and to the C. M. S. Press for printing it.

I pray for God's continued blessing on the Christava Mahilalayam, its pupils and staff past and present, and thank God for the many friends who have helped the School by their generous gifts during the past fifty years.

35 Gloucester Avenue, 1976.

HESTER SMITH



## I

### HOW I CAME TO INDIA

I was born in 1894 at Fort William in the Highlands of Scotland, where my father was helping to manage the estate of his uncle, Lord Abinger. My sister Dorothy was also born in Scotland, but just before the birth of my youngest sister Fay, my father moved to Somerset in the west of England in order to act as land agent to his father-in-law Mr. Duckworth.

My sisters and I had a very happy childhood. My father and mother were the kindest of parents. We lived in a small house only a mile away from my grandfather's big house where my mother's large family, my uncles and aunts and cousins, were constantly gathering. My grandmother was deeply religious and I owe much to her influence.

I can trace my first interest in missionary work to three Miss Hays who lived with their old mother in the village of Buckland Dinham near my home. They were all unmarried, middle-aged, and the two eldest were very old-fashioned and still wore nineteenth century bonnets to go to church. They were great supporters of the Church Missionary Society and the annual Missionary Sale of Work (thought by us children to be a 'Sailor Work' though its connection with the Navy was not obvious) was one of the events of our small lives. I decided that I would be a missionary when I grew up and as I had always heard of India from my father's brother who was the Colonel of a regiment stationed out there and from an aunt whose husband was in the same regiment, I thought I would go as a missionary to India.

But I forgot about this idea for many years. My sisters and I were educated by German and Swiss governesses at home and I had only one year at school where I passed the Higher Certificate Examination. I did not go on to college till some six years later. During the first World War 1914—1918 I worked as a cook in Red Cross Hospitals and in a Land Army Hostel. Then I studied for three years at the London University and



took my degree. For two years I taught at a very good boarding school under a capable and original headmistress, Miss Olive Willis. I was at the same time reading for the Archbishop's Diploma in Theology and it was at Lambeth Palace where I had gone to receive my Diploma that I heard Miss D. J. Stephen speak about a new college for training missionaries that she was founding in Madras. With my Degree and new Theological Diploma I thought I might join her staff but she suggested that I should come as a student.

My parents were not at all anxious for me to go to India but my father offered to finance me for a year so that I could go without making any commitment about the future though my hope was that I might get a teaching post in South India.

I sailed for India in October 1927 on a British India boat. After the sorrow of parting with my family, especially from my sister Dorothy who had been ill, I was thrilled by my first voyage to the East. In 1927 it was still an all-red (that is an all British) route. We passed the great rock of Gibraltar, called at Malta, from Port Said sailed down the Suez Canal and put in at Aden, the ship spent two days in Colombo and I was able to take a drive up to Kandy and see for the first time a tropical countryside and finally I landed in Madras—all these places were then either part of the British Empire or in the case of Egypt with strong British connections. How the world has changed since that date with Gibraltar the only remaining outpost of Britain!

Dorothea Stephen, the youngest daughter of Sir James Fitzjames Stephen, was at that time 56 years old. Unlike her cousin Leslie Stephen, an agnostic, Dorothea was an ardent High Church woman with very definite views which she expressed in a loud voice and it is no wonder that her young cousin Virginia Woolf found her aggressive. When I came to stay with her in Madras I discovered a very tolerant, wise and even jolly person. Miss Stephen had come out to India in middle life and became so deeply interested in the country, its history and religions, that she was planning to found a college in Madras where missionary recruits could come to do their language study and also learn something about the country they had come to serve. I was to be her first, and to begin with, her only student, at a rented house, 3 Ritherdon Road, and it was not till July of the following year that we moved to more permanent quarters at 19 Church Street Vepery and called the house St. Andrews



College. Later that autumn two more students joined, Vera Pitman, who went on to be a Sister Tutor at Vellore Medical College, and Dr. Alexander, a Presbyterian missionary.

The year I spent in Madras was a very useful introduction to South Indian city life. I had daily Tamil lessons from a clever Brahman who could explain Tamil grammar in English grammatical terms. Miss Stephen herself 'lectured' to me on Indian history and religions and took me to see Hindu processions and temoles and to visit Indian homes. I joined the Lady Willingdon Club where I played tennis with Indian and English ladies, helped to run an Indian Guide Company and even for a short time gave some coaching in French to a small group of students at the Women's Christian College.

Two remarkable women whom I came to know in Madras were Miss McDougall and Deaconess Creighton. Miss McDougall, the first Principal of the Women's Christian College, was a Wesleyan with a strong serene personality and a deep concern for the character development as well as for the higher education of the students. She brought from Westfield College in London the best traditions of a residential Christian College. I did not know her well personally but, through the graduates who had taken their degrees at the Women's Christian College and who later became my friends and fellow workers, I came to realize what a profound influence she had exercised on them. She prayed daily for all her students past and present and remembered each one and even their husbands when they came back to visit her.

Deaconess Creighton had come out to Madras to work among the Anglo-Indian (Eurasian) community and was in charge of the little church of St. Barnabas where she took the services and preached. She was living at a small bungalow 'St. Faiths' with one or two other deaconesses leading an ordered life of devotion and good works. In a letter to my sister I described her: 'Her face is pale and plain with spectacles but an inner beauty shines through it so that your eyes are drawn to it again and again in order to find out the secret of that great peace. She is full of fun and wit too, clever and cultured.' Besides her work among the poor she had many friends among the English Government and business and University circles and one evening a week was at home to her friends for light refreshment, music, conversation and occasionally such games as charades. Bridget Landor, a niece of the poet



Walter Savage Landor, pretty, attractive and modest, had come to work with Deaconess Creighton that winter and we soon became great friends and were doing many pleasant things together such as bathing and playing tennis and spending our holidays together. Later Bridget herself was ordained as a Deaconess and Deaconess Creighton, who must have hoped that she would take over the work at St. Faiths one day, disapproved of her marriage to the Vicar of the parish in England where she was working for a time during World War II. But Bridget continued to work as a deaconess in her husband's parish, nursed him devotedly when he became ill, then after his death spent her time helping other old friends. She was utterly good and unselfish with a quiet whimsical humour of her own. We remained friends until her sudden death from heart failure in 1966.

I made various other friends outside the missionary circle. I put down my name in the Visitors' Book at Government House, attended a State Ball and Garden Party and lunched privately, though with some trepidation, with the Governor and his wife, Lord and Lady Willingdon, to whom my mother had given me an introduction. The Governor of Madras, representing the King Emperor, kept up an almost royal state.

I stayed in Bangalore at Christmas with some army friends of my aunt and delighted in a visit to her friends on a Mysore coffee plantation where I became fascinated by the birds and flowers. During the hot weather, Mrs. Taffs, the Y. W. C. A. secretary, asked me to help at a Girl Guide Holiday Centre at Ootacamund in the hills and I went on to stay with Miss Hopwood who provided a most hospitable and economical holiday home for missionaries. There I met Mr. Fison, the Professor of Botany at the Presidency College, Madras, who had written, and his wife illustrated, "A Flora of the Nilgiri and Pulni Hilltops", so could always consult him about flowers that I wanted to identify.

But my hope was, as soon as I had passed my first Tamil exam., to get a post as a teacher in one of the missionary schools in South India. I visited the Sarah Tucker School in Tinnevely and the S. P. G. High School at Nazareth and was most kindly received but I was not evidently wanted, my skirts were too short and my dresses too sleeveless as was the fashion then. At Dohnavur I was greatly impressed by the beauty of



the place and Miss Carmichael's work with the orphans she had rescued from dedication to temples, but I and other visitors were amused that we had to put on special long dresses before we were taken round lest our modern short skirts should shock the devoted staff and children. Other posts were proposed to me, at an Anglo-Indian school and at a school in the hills, but neither seemed the right place for me and I felt that doors were being shut in my face and decided to wait quietly for a time until the door opened by which I was meant to enter.

It happened like this. Miss E. T. Stevens, a lecturer in English at the Women's Christian College and a friend of Miss Dorothea Stephen, came to stay at St. Andrews. She had been lent for two years to start a new school on the West Coast. Miss Sara Chacko was to succeed her as Headmistress but had been appointed to an important post in North India and Miss Stevens was looking for someone to take her place at the end of the school year in March 1929 when she was due to return to the W. C. C. She suggested that I should visit the school and perhaps take over from her when she left. I had already met A. A. Paul, a most interesting and intelligent worker with the Student Christian Movement but at that time chiefly concerned with an International Fellowship promoting discussions between Hindus, Moslems and Christians. He invited me to go for a drive in his car and told me about this new school on the West Coast which he and a friend of his, P. K. Matthew, had founded. The full story is told in P. K. Matthew's little history of the school but I must retell here the main events which led to the founding of the Christava Mahilalayam.

A. A. Paul and P. K. Matthew were students from the native state of Travancore who were much influenced by the saintly K. C. Chacko, a lecturer at their college, the Madras Christian College. He as well as these two students, were members of the Syrian Church which claimed to have been founded by St. Thomas and had certainly existed as a fully organized Church on the West Coast of India since the early centuries of the Christian era. There were at that time in Travancore Christians belonging to several other Churches as well as to the Syrian Church, to a reformed branch of that Church called the Mar Thoma Church, to the Anglican Church of India Burma and Ceylon as well as to the Roman Catholic Church, and there was considerable rivalry among the Churches with each Church setting up its own educational institutions.



K. C. Chacko, long before the days when ecumenism became a household word, was praying for unity among Christians and as a practical step had inspired a group of his students to start a Union Christian College at Alwaye in North Travancore where members of the different Churches, except the Roman Catholics, would be on the Governing Board and form a fellowship to pray and work together to run the college. The Union Christian College was actually started in 1924.

Now A. A. Paul and P. K. Matthew inspired by similar ideals saw the need for a residential girls' school in North Travancore. They had both been married to young girls who had only completed a very limited education, so they sent their wives back to school and set out to found the school they were dreaming of. In Central Travancore there were several good girls' schools, the Baker Memorial at Kottayam, founded by the C. M. S., the Nicholson, a Mar Thoma residential school at Thiruvalla, and the quite recently opened Balikamadam for girls of the Syrian Church. But in North Travancore there was no Christian boarding school for girls. So A. A. Paul set out to collect money from English and Indian friends and P. K. Matthew to look for a site.

Much of this I only learnt at a later date but A. A. Paul did tell me of the building begun on a hill top near Alwaye where P. K. Matthew had bought some 34 acres of land from the C. M. S. which owned it. In May 1927 the school had opened in the C. M. S. Bungalow in Alwaye with 21 pupils and 3 teachers but had moved the following year to the still unfinished building on the hill top. A. A. Paul told me of his visions for the future and proposed that I should visit the school with the view, should the Governing Board approve of me, of taking over as Headmistress when Miss Stevens left in March 1929. He told me that the name of the school 'Christava Mahilalayam' meant Christian House of Women and that it was to be run on similar lines to the Union Christian College.

I was thrilled. Was this the opening I had been waiting for? Of course there were drawbacks. I was learning Tamil, and another South Indian language with a totally different script was spoken in Travancore, the Malayalam language. I was English and A. A. Paul had hoped for an Indian headmistress. But then I was in India with no need for a passage to be paid for me to come out from England and perhaps I should be able



to accept the very small and uncertain salary that would be available. I was 33 and older and more experienced than the young graduates Miss Stevens had collected of whom the oldest, Sosamma Daniel, was only 26. Miss D. J. Stephen fully backed me up in considering A. A. Paul's proposal. So I planned to visit the new school at Alwaye in December.



## II

### MY FIRST VISIT TO ALWAYE

I left Madras on December 4th by the West Coast Mail at 7.40 in the evening and woke next morning to find that the train was approaching a great wall of mountains. How often in succeeding years have I made that journey looking out in the early light of dawn on the waking world of the rural countryside, patient slow moving oxen drawing water from the wells, men carrying hoes and women in red cotton saris going off to work in the fields. I expected a tunnel through the mountains but found we were crossing them by one of the very few gaps.

The great range of the Western Ghats, rising to some mountains from 8000 to 9000 feet high, stretches along the west coast of India from north of Bombay to Cape Comorin, the extreme southern tip of India. The strip of country between the mountains and the sea which is now the State of Kerala was then divided into three parts, the princely State of Travancore in the southern third, the little State of Cochin in the centre and a northern part which was then under direct British rule and was part of the Madras State.

At Shoranur I had to change trains as the main line continued north to Mangalore and only a narrow-gauge railway ran south to Travancore and Cochin, stopping at every minute wayside station but as it was my first view of the west coast I rather enjoyed its slow progress. It is a marvellously fertile strip of country crossed by many rivers and copiously watered by the heavy monsoon rains caught by the mountain range. I could see occasional glimpses of these mountains away to my left and enjoy the lovely rich country through which I was passing, green fields fringed with palms and other fruit trees, ponds and lakes dotted with large cream and pink water lilies. I got more and more excited as the train got nearer to Alwaye.



Here I was met by a small bus, the only available form of transport except for bullock carts and rickshaws. Soon we had left the little town and were driving along a shady road by the river side, though the river itself was invisible, so thickly grew the trees in the compounds of the houses along its bank. Then a sharp right hand turn up a rather rough road brought us onto the open hill side. I hardly knew which to gaze at first, the school buildings of a warm golden red which seemed to grow out of the soil or the magnificent view of the mountains behind them. I had decided before the bus drew up at the front door that I would come and live in this beautiful place. There on the doorstep was Miss Stevens and her dog Peter to greet me with a little group of teachers and children.

The school building which was quite unfinished and unplastered consisted of a hall and class rooms built round the four sides of a courtyard with a little raintree planted in the middle. Miss Stevens took me in to share a large corner room which she occupied and to eat a meal in the little library next door, waited on by her servant Markose (of whom I must write more later on). As there were then so few children and teachers, most of the rooms which were one day to be class rooms were used by the teachers as bedrooms and as dormitories for the children. On the west side of the building was a long thatched shed of bamboo matting which served as a dining-room and, behind a partition, as a boxroom and dressing room for the children. Beyond this was a small stone-built kitchen and storeroom.

Otherwise the hill top was bare except for the very few trees which had been planted on its slopes.

But as I walked out in the evening onto the more or less level ground that was to be the school playground, a breathtaking view was spread out before my eyes. Miles and miles of what looked like a great forest stretched to the foot of the Ghats, actually a densely populated country-side, for round every paddy field were the little thatched huts of the labourers and the larger houses were so surrounded by trees as to be invisible.

The mountains rising to their highest peak in Anamudi, the Elephant's Head, some 9000 feet high, ringed the northern and western horizons, as I saw them first in December a most lovely gentian blue, but at other seasons quite invisible or only



visible as grey shadowy masses, or at early dawn clear dark silhouettes against a flaming sunrise. But my love of mountains fostered by reading the English poets, Wordsworth, Byron and Scott and by climbing hills, was not shared by many of my Indian friends who felt they were remote and even dangerous, the haunts of wild elephants and tigers, which indeed they were.

The great river Periyar wound its way round the foot of our little hill quite hidden by the dense vegetation on its wooded banks. The only water supply on the hilltop was one very deep well from which the waterman drew up buckets of water with a rope and windlass, of excellent quality but necessarily limited in quantity, so the children went every evening to bathe in the river and I was soon joining them. The great river was at this season crystal clear with no strong current and we could undress on the wide sandy banks. Though mostly shallow it was deep enough for swimming at the centre and deliciously warm.

Mr P. K. Matthew, the school secretary, took me round the school estate, as yet unfenced so that our neighbours' cattle wandered freely over the hill to graze on any scant vegetation they could find. Mr. Matthew shewed me the rubber trees he had planted in the valleys and a few cashewnut trees, but most of the ground was entirely uncultivated, with the red laterite rock not far below the surface. On the south side the estate boundary at the foot of the hill skirted a great paddy field which during the rainy season looked like a lake but when it was drained and planted became an expanse of emerald green like a velvet carpet. Beyond this rose quite a considerable hill where the armies of Tippu Sultan were said to have been halted when he invaded Travancore in 1789.



### III

#### THE ST. THOMAS CHRISTIANS

On my first Sunday at the Christava Mahilalayam in 1928 I went with some of the teachers and children by boat down the river to attend the service in the Syrian Christian church at Alwaye. I was greatly impressed by the service which was called Holy Qurbana (Qurbana means an offering) and I wrote a long description of it to my mother. The officiating priest wore magnificent vestments and was assisted by a black-robed priest and two deacons. The liturgy was in Malayalam but this was quite an innovation as the original liturgy was in Syriac. The service was chanted by the priests with the congregation joining in many responses. The men on one side of the church and the women on the other remained standing throughout the service. A curtain across the sanctuary was closed during certain parts of the service which was very dramatic. Bishop Leslie Brown in his book on the St. Thomas Christians says, 'The centre of community life was the parish church where Sunday by Sunday all the people gathered to see the drama of redemption and Christ's reign in glory shewn forth even if they could not understand the words of the service.' I felt a great spirit of reverence and was impressed by the way the congregation joined in the service.

During my years at Alwaye I attended the Qurbana many times and was given an English translation which was made for Lord Irwin when as Viceroy he visited Travancore in 1929. Some of the most dramatic and impressive moments of the service were the giving of the 'Kiss of Peace' by the celebrant to the deacon and passed on by every member of the congregation taking his neighbour's right hand between the palms of his; and then when, after the consecration, the priest waves his hands over the Holy Elements to signify the descent of the Holy Spirit with the words, "My beloved how fearful is this moment and how dreadful is this time when the Holy Spirit descends from heaven and from the heights above and dwells upon this Holy Qurbana to sanctify



it. Stand ye in silence and pray." The curtain is then closed while the congregation chant with the seraphim of Isaiah's vision the 'Holy, Holy, Holy' which has been the Church's cry of worship down the ages. Then the curtain is again drawn back and the priest comes forward lifting up first the paten and then the chalice and the congregation chant hymns of eucharistic adoration with the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Thomas and all the Saints. The priest makes his own communion behind the closed curtain and when he again comes forward bearing the Holy Mysteries in his hands then it is the proper time for the people to make their communion, but it had become a custom for those who wished to communicate to do so only after the service and on special occasions.

For those of my readers who may not know much about the Syrian Christians I must briefly write something about them.

The 1931 census records that 31% of the Travancore population were Christians and of these 17% were Syrian Christians. I saw Christian churches wherever I went.

The ancient Syrian Church of Malabar claims as its founder the Apostle Thomas who is said to have landed in 52 A. D. at Malankara near Cranganore on the west coast of India and to have founded seven churches. In the first century regular trade was carried on between the eastern Mediterranean and Malabar, whence pepper, spices and precious stones were exported. There was also coastal shipping coming down the west coast of India from the Persian Gulf, and the Indian St. Thomas Christians were strengthened, according to tradition, by several groups of East Syrian families who migrated to Malabar. It is generally agreed that the name 'Syrian' comes from the close connection of this West Indian Church with East Syria. This Church looked to the Patriarch of Babylon as its Patriarch and the language of the liturgy was Syriac. There has certainly existed since the early centuries of the Christian era a fully organized Church on the West Coast of India which has preserved the Christian faith down the centuries to the present day.

When the Portuguese came to trade in India in the 16th century they were interested in the Indian Christians. A very domineering Portuguese Archbishop of Goa succeeded in bringing the Syrian Church, at the Synod of Diamper in

1599, to acknowledge the supremacy of Rome, but allowed a revised version of the Syriac liturgy to be used. However the discipline of the Jesuit Fathers was resented by the Syrian Christians and on a dramatic occasion at the Coonen Cross some fifty year later they swore to expel the Jesuits and free themselves from the authority of the Pope. They sent to the Eastern Churches for a Bishop and in 1665 a Bishop was sent to them from the West Syrian Church of Antioch. The St. Thomas Christians accepted this bishop and now looked to the Syrian Patriarch of Antioch as their Head. Their Church is officially called the Malankara Syrian Church (Malankara being the place where St. Thomas is said to have landed). They became known as Jacobites, this name being derived from Jacobus Baradaeus, a 7th century leader of the Antioch Church.

A small group of Syrian Christians calling themselves Chaldeans continued to look to the Patriarch of Babylon as their head and formed a diocese round Trichur in the Cochin State.

When the British East India Company made a Treaty with Travancore in 1836 an English resident was sent to advise the Rajah. The second of these Residents, Col. Munro, was interested in the Indian Christian Church and asked the Church Missionary Society to send missionaries to help the Indian Church. At first the missionaries worked happily with the Indian Metropolitan, but difficulties arose, the missionaries proposed certain reforms which the Indians rejected and in 1836 the Church Missionary Society ended its connection with the Syrian Church and began to work independently, forming a diocese of the Anglican Church. They were joined by some Syrian Christians, and preached the Gospel far and wide, with the result that a Church grew up that finally embraced hill tribes and out-caste sections of the people.

In 1889 a reforming party broke away from the Syrian Church and founded the Mar Thoma Church which was strong on evangelisation and in 1894 started the great Maramon Convention which annually attracts thousands of people. The Mar Thoma Church was in Communion with the Anglican Diocese of Travancore and Cochin.

As the Christava Mahilalayam was planned to be a Union Christian School, there were on the Governing Board three members of each of these Churches, the Malankara Syrian Church,



the Mar Thoma Syrian Church, the Anglican Church in Travancore (later the Church of South India) and the Church of the East (Chaldean). The Leaders of the different Churches visited our School and gave us their blessing.

While I was at Alwaye I heard that there was a long drawn out dispute in the Malankara Syrian Church between those mainly living in North Travancore, who accepted the authority of the Patriarch of Antioch and were known as Jacobites, and those living round Kottayam and further south who, while prepared to continue friendly relations with the Patriarch of Antioch, repudiated the title 'Jacobite' and wanted to be recognized as the Syrian Orthodox Church of Malankara with the Catholicos resident at Kottayam as their ecclesiastical head. There was litigation in the courts regarding Church property which both sides claimed as theirs. However the Christava Mahilalayam was a union school and we did not have to enter into the merits of the dispute between the 'Patriarch's party' and the 'Catholicos's party.'

I found fine and devoted Christians among members of all the Churches and felt we had all much to learn from each other and could work and pray together.

#### IV

#### A VISIT TO PARUR

After my first December visit to Alwaye I returned to Madras until the Governing Board of the Christava Mahilalayam had officially appointed me as Headmistress to take over from Miss Stevens at the beginning of the new school year in May 1929. Then I came back to spend the next two months in Travancore learning all I could about the community among whom I had come to work and trying to convert my little Tamil into a little Malayalam.

I spent a week at Parur staying at the house of Mr. K. A. Paulose where I had already paid a short visit in December. I must explain for some of my English readers the names of these Christians. Most baptismal names were Bible names, so many of the boys were called Jacob (Chacko) Paul (Paulose) Matthew (Mathen) or Mark (Markose). George (Vergheese, Varkey or Gheevarghese) and Alexander (Chandy) were also common. Many of the girls were called Mary (Mariam) Anna or Elizabeth (Aley) and there were also many Marthas, Rebeccas and Rachels. The baptismal name was preceded by two initials, the first that of the house or family and the second that of the baptismal name of the father. Thus two sisters would be entered on the school register as M. V. Aley and M. V. Thankamma, the suffix amma (mother) often being added to girls' names. But the custom was growing of using the father's baptismal name as a surname so the daughters of a Mr. Varkey might be entered, one as K. V. Annamma and another as Saramma Varkey. Most boys and girls were actually called by pet names such as Mon or Kunju, for boys, and Rani, Gracy or Lily for girls.

But I must now describe my visit to Parur. Parur is one of the places at which St. Thomas is said to have founded one of seven churches. All the original churches were built of wood and no existing church in Travancore is older than the 15th century. Mr. Paulose told me that the Syrian church



at Parur was 500 years old but it is the Roman Catholic church which is said to be on the site of the original church founded by St. Thomas. Although Parur is only a small town, families belonging to various Christian denominations live there. There are Syrians, Roman Catholics, Anglicans and Plymouth Brethren as well of course as Hindus and some Moslems.

Parur is situated about 9 miles north of Alwaye in a sandy belt not far from the coast where millions of palm trees grow and the cultivation of the coconut is the source of the riches of the owners of the great gardens in which the trees are planted. In the little town, apart from one small street of shops, the roads were narrow lanes between the high fences of the coconut gardens. The house where I was visiting belonged to a well-to-do Syrian Christian family typical of the homes from which many of my future pupils would be coming. It was a wonderful old house with gabled roofs and beautiful carving. Like the churches, most Travancore houses were originally built of wood, though by that date many were being built of stone with tiled roofs, but all or nearly all retained the very characteristic upturned eaves with little carved wooden pinnacles and ventilators and carved running boards under the eaves. This house stood in a sanded courtyard-there was no garden-surrounded by a high fence outside of which waved the fringed leaves of the tall palm trees growing all round it.

The family consisted of the old father, Mr. Abraham, the head of the family and a much respected person who occupied the main large room in the front of the house where all his meals were served separately and in whose presence no junior member of the family might sit. He spoke to me in slow measured English. As he looked at the portraits on the walls of the King and Queen we spoke of the King's recent illness and of his goodness and of how his people loved him. Then we talked of Parur and its coconut trees. K. A. Paulose, his son, was a Sanskrit scholar and a poet and spoke fluent English. Mr. Abraham had two brothers living in other houses in the town with their families including a married son, his wife and five children, and in another, one or two widowed aunts. All these families had all their money in one fund and Mr. Paulose told me that if he had not had a little money of his own left him by some other relation he would have had to ask his father for money to go on even a short journey. Of course the women had no money at all of their

own, the dowries that their fathers paid on their marriage went entirely to the husband's family. K. A. Paulose's wife was a sweet little woman. Married when still a child, she had been brought very young to manage the house after her mother-in-law's death. She had two children, a sturdy boy of four and a fat baby. She knew no English so I had to practise my few Malayalam words if I wanted to talk to her. She rose, I believe, each morning at 4 o'clock to read her Bible, her 'Daily Light' and 'Imitation of Christ' in Malayalam translations. She seemed to spend her time in the kitchen or looking after the children. She had servants but as soon as it was light she herself brought me a quaint little meal, a cup of coffee, two boiled eggs and some sweet biscuits. A large breakfast was served about 9 o'clock with fried eggs, savoury cutlets, fried bananas, pancakes, bread, butter, jam and coffee. At noon an immense feast began with fish or chicken, followed by rice and a variety of curries and plantains. The evening meal was at varying hours sometimes as late as nine. My little hostess seemed to lead a very restricted life. When I suggested to Mr. Paulose that she should come out with us one afternoon he said, "Oh she will stay at home and look after the children." The men seemed quite contented that their wives should wait on them at meals and only eat afterwards in the kitchen.

One day Mr. Paulose and a cousin of his took me by boat down the river till we reached the great salt water backwater. We were punted along this for a couple of miles looking at all the processes of coconut product manufacture that were being carried on on the banks. The trees bear eight crops of coconuts a year and apart from the use of the coconut as food and of the coconut oil used in cooking and lamp lighting, the fibrous outer covering is converted into coir and the hard interior lining put out to dry and exported for the oils to be extracted from it for soap making.

We landed near a picturesque little village where a Hindu festival was in progress. Two rows of great elephants stood facing each other, nine in each row. On the central elephant in each row a man was standing holding a gold ornamented disk with the image of a god on it while an attendant held a green silk umbrella fringed with gold over him. On each of the four elephants ranged on either side, was a man on the first holding a crimson silk umbrella, on the second two great horse-tail whisks, on the third two giant peacock feather fans. About every five



minutes a gun was fired, the men with the peacock fans held them high over their heads, the men with the whisks whirled them round and round while tom-toms kept up an excited drumming. The whole effect was most thrilling, but as I was the only white woman in the place I found that I was proving a greater attraction than two gods and eighteen elephants so we had to make our way out of the crowd that were pressing round us.

On another day I was taken on a lovely expedition down to the sea. This time Mrs. Paulose and the four year old Baboo did come with us as well as another cousin and his two boys. We went in the family boat which had a little hooded cabin and was rowed by eight men with a boy to scoop out water and an old man to direct and encourage. We left the landing stage at half past four and swung out into the river in great style, the rowers chanting a queer rhythmic song. Down the wide green river we sped into the wider backwater with palm trees still on either bank but now too far off to overhang the boat. There was every variety of craft on the water, great heavy rice barges with large matting sails, little slios of boats paddled by one small boy, a launch plying between two towns, punts, and our fine equipage with its rows of men bending over their oars.

The backwater runs parallel to the sea and we had to disembark and walk across a narrow strip of land and charter a queer rickety sea boat to take us along another stretch of water to the sandy beach. There we stood looking out over the Arabian Sea just as the golden rim of the setting sun was touching the deep gray water. Behind us lay water and sand, fishing nets and palm trees all intertwined and over all the silver light of the rising full moon. The return journey was enchanting. We sat on the roof of the low cabin and looked out over the heads of the rowers to a scene of exquisite beauty, the great moon and a few bright stars undaunted by the moonlight, the waving fringed palm leaves black against the sky and here and there sparkling like diamonds where they were caught in the moonbeams. Below, the still dim water reflected the moon and the stars and the waving palm leaves, and the silence was only broken by the chanting of our boatmen. It must have been too familiar a scene for the family in the boat to be as thrilled by it as I was. But in spite of Parur's beauty, I felt when I got back to the Mahilalayam that I preferred its open spaces and the refreshing breeze of the hill top.

## V

### HEADMISTRESS

After a holiday in the hills at Kodaikanal during the hot weather I returned on the 16th of May 1929 to take up my post as headmistress of this very small new School; with 30 new pupils the total number was only 60, but I felt very frightened and inadequate. Though the School was small I had quite a busy job as I was warden and bursar as well as headmistress and I had to face many problems known and unknown, but, though I was inexperienced, I had an excellent staff.

Miss Stevens had recruited three graduates from the Women's Christian College, Sosamma Daniel, Saramma Philipose and Mariam Isaac. The two former had also taken a year's teacher training at St. Christophers College and Mariamma had spent a year getting some training in nursing at the Rainy Hospital. Saramma I remember less well as she left the School later that year to take a post in Kunnamkulam. She was a widow with a little son and wanted to return to her native town, but Sosamma and Mariamma, until her death in 1964, have been my life-long friends.

Sosamma had been married while she was still at college to a young deacon in the Syrian Church and he and her family looked after her two little boys so that she could continue her studies and then come to teach at the Christava Mahilalayam. Later her husband with the boys came to live near the School and Kunju and Johny were both pupils in the Middle School forms. Sosamma had a very good mind, a clear power of judgment and a steady reliable character. She would have made a very good doctor and her diagnosis in any case of illness was invaluable. I came to rely on her when any difficult decision had to be made. She was also good in money matters and at a later date managed the School finances during a very difficult time. When I came as Headmistress I soon learnt to value her sterling qualities.



Of Mariamma Isaac I must write when I come to tell of her marriage. The other teacher who had been with Miss Stevens was Elizabeth Thomas (Kocheliamma) a lively little undergraduate who was teaching Form I. She got married in 1930 but as Mrs. Elizabeth Chacko, my friendship with her has continued all these years though she is now a widow and a grandmother. Miss Paul was our Matron but I could not talk much with her as she spoke little English. We added to our staff Sosamma Thomas and P. V. Sosamma, and M. T. Mary for sewing and drawing.

Some of the discomforts as well as the good things of those early days may best be described in a letter of school reminiscences by Anna Joseph who as Anna Punnoose, a bright little 12 years old, joined the Form III in 1929. She writes :—

‘I must say I felt a little deflated by the unprepossessing appearance of the new School. It was an unplastered building on a bare hill top. Mat tatties took the place of window panes or shutters, the floors were covered with cow dung (which actually when dry formed a very good hard surface) and there were white ant heaps here and there. My memory may not be accurate but we were about 30 boarders and the rest day girls from the neighbourhood. The small size of the School must have caused a lot of headaches to those who were running it but it gave us the sense of being like a family. We had our share of trials—we sat on wooden planks in the dining room and shrieked when frogs leaped around us and into our plates; the box-room was smelly and stuffy; the pit latrines were nothing to write home about and it was an ordeal to have to bathe along with several others in cold soapy water from cement tubs. In the hot months we were taken to the river to bathe, but the long walk back up the hill made us perspire all over again. On Sundays we would go to church in open boats down the river. The trip was all right in the cool morning but the return trip upstream was not so pleasant; we shielded ourselves from the hot rays of the sun with open umbrellas and by dipping our fingers in the river to feel the cool water. Some of the sturdy ones preferred to walk the three miles back by road but I was not much of a walker and seem stoically to have endured the rigours of the boat trip back Sunday by Sunday. This spartan existence was shared by the staff as well. They too had dormitories but only the staff had cots while we slept on mats on the floor. I remember being envious of those who brought mattresses and I tried

to persuade my mother to let me take one to school but she very wisely told me that mats were enough for young girls.' (Indeed the children continued to sleep on mats until quite recent years when cots were introduced, but when I saw how soundly they slept on their mats and the ease with which mats could be rolled up and floors cleaned it seemed a simplicity worth preserving. H. S.)

'My passion at this stage was reading and there was a good selection of books in the library (many of the old-fashioned children's books). During the long lunch break we had an hour to rest which I utilized for reading. We were very lucky indeed in our teachers. Originality was encouraged, there was no dictation of notes and standards were high. I believe one of the classes we found most enjoyable was Natural Science. Most of our nature study was done out of doors and rightly so. Instead of making the statement that water lily plants have broad soft leaves and letting us draw diagrams from a book, our teacher would take us for a 'nature walk' pointing out on our way to the paddy fields that the plants on the hot dry hill had small leathery leaves. The note we made that night might go like this: "This morning we went down to the paddy fields. We saw the leaves of the water lilies were smooth and soft" (which lesson was remembered 40 years later). I thank God I had the privilege of having been taught by as fine a batch of teachers as can be found anywhere. As I look back over the years I recall with gratitude that the foundations for certain basic beliefs and values were well and truly laid in those formative years between eleven and fifteen. The confirmation preparation classes were most inspiring and so was the personal example of genuine spirituality that we saw in several of our teachers.'

Sosamma Daniel was an excellent teacher of Geography preparing her lessons with great care from good English text books and using a set of large wall maps. Mariam Isaac made her maths pupils work hard and think for themselves. I taught English in the upper forms and greatly enjoyed teaching Nature Study during the first year, but the following year I decided that I had no time to devote to delightful early morning rambles to collect specimens and must give my teaching time to English. So we appointed a Natural Science graduate, Francina Jonas. I also took Scripture lessons with the older girls and confirmation classes with girls belonging to the Anglican Church, the first



confirmation candidates being Anna Punnoose, T. A. Anna and J. Catherine.

A majority of our girls belonged to the Malankara Syrian Church and were referred to as Jacobites. Only a small number were members of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church and of the Anglican Church. We also had some Hindu and Moslem pupils both as boarders and as day girls. Our religious policy was the same as that of the Union Christian College. All the Christian girls (except the few Roman Catholics) joined together for the worship which opened the school day and attended the daily Scripture lessons. But we wanted the girls to use the forms of worship of their own Church and to understand its distinctive teaching. The Jacobites recited their own set daily prayers, while the Mar Thoma and Anglican girls joined together for Bible reading and prayers. On Sundays we all attended our own churches in Alwaye and teachers took Sunday classes for girls of their own Church. We all united for a Sunday evening service.

From the first Miss Stevens had set aside a special Prayer Room, but very soon we were planning to build our own simple Chapel. In a letter to my mother I have described it. It was built on a site a little to the north of where our present Chapel stands. This is what I wrote on September 29th 1930:— All this week we have been very busy putting the final touches to our Chapel and on Saturday morning the children all went out to collect wild flowers to decorate it. It is very simple with low stone walls about two feet high, open sides and a thatched roof. The east end is raised and shut off by a blue curtain according to the Syrian fashion. On the back wall of the sanctuary so enclosed is a curtain of deeper blue and in front of this stands a little altar with a soft mauve linen cover embroidered with a golden cross. We have been given a beautiful cross of black wood and two tall candlesticks to match and there are also on the altar two brass vases with beautiful white flowers. Just below the sanctuary step stands a plain wooden reading desk and on the other side a low prayer desk. The children all sit on little square mats. There was great excitement over the decorations as the children have been allowed to make chains of coloured paper and there were flowers all down the sides. In spite of its plainness it really did look beautiful when the sanctuary curtain was drawn back. On every side is an exquisite view looking to the far away mountains.

On Saturday morning at 11 o'clock the opening service was conducted by one of our Governing Board members, the Rev. John Kurien. The Chapel was filled with children in white veils and the white and blue in the bright light made a lovely picture. We had a beautiful little service with hymns, an address and prayers of offering. Now the children and the teachers could use the Chapel for their daily devotions as well as for our morning opening worship and Sunday evening service.

But in a great storm the following May the roof was blown off the new Chapel which showed that such a temporary building could not stand up to the great winds on our exposed hill top. All the materials were there but it had practically to be rebuilt so we decided to shift it to the central position where we had always planned to have our permanent Chapel. I reckoned that the rebuilding would cost in English money £7 or £8 and asked my mother for a donation of £1 towards this. I do not remember what it cost to put up the first Chapel or what kind friends had given the money.

From the beginning a Staff Council met rather informally when any decisions had to be taken and, because I was inexperienced in the customs of the country, I was glad to be guided by the opinion of the teachers. I valued greatly the freedom with which they would approach me if I made any mistake. I remember quite clearly one evening when I got impatient because a show that the children were putting on was very late in starting and blurted out my protest. Later a little staff deputation knocked at my door to tell me how I had hurt their feelings by rebuking them in front of the children. My apology was followed by even closer co-operation.

I wish I could recall more clearly my fellow workers of those early years. I can never forget P. K. Kurien who came to be our writer in May 1930. (A secretary in India was generally called a writer which is the term used in the Navy and was no doubt inherited from the days of the East India Company). P. K. Kurien was very careful and neat, though rather slow, but he never got ruffled or fussed. Nor do I forget young Papoo our peon for so many years who went daily to Alwaye to shop and fetch our mail. His market purchases would come back in big baskets on the heads of coolie women.

Among the teachers I have not yet mentioned, I remember best Chachy Samuel, later Mrs. Thomas, who came to us with



such warm recommendations from Miss McDougall. She was an excellent history teacher and is a dear friend with whom I still correspond. Of Elizabeth Isaac, who came to teach Natural Science when Francina Jonas left, I must write in a later chapter for she served the school for over forty years and is one of my dearest friends. There was tall Susanna Thomas (Mrs. Tharu) and lively Anna Alexander and Sosa Abraham, our music teacher who, with the little violinists she taught, accompanied our hymn singing in Chapel. Alack, I was very unmusical and none of the rest of our staff cared much for music. When Sosamma left, the visiting music master we secured did not seem to be able to inspire the children. So the musical education of the School was much neglected. Also my efforts to get some really good Art teaching were ineffectual though I had great hopes at one time of securing a teacher trained by Tagore at Shanti Niketan. But Needlework and Embroidery were very well taught. The girls learnt to make their own jackets, underclothes and children's dresses and loved embroidering cushion covers and tablecloths. One little Moslem pupil told me afterwards how her family admired the skills she had acquired and indeed at that date, when Moslem women in well-to-do homes had little to occupy their time, to teach them embroidery was to give them a real pastime for their future leisure hours. I remember with pleasure visiting the home of an Old Girl and found she had beautified it with embroidered cushions and tablecloths whereas the usual rooms were so bare of ornament. Another Old Girl has recalled how a plan on Saturday evenings for a group of girls to do their own mending, the older girls helping the younger ones, had started her off on a life-long habit of mending her torn clothes instead of throwing them away.

Another of our plans to help the girls to learn to manage money was a pocket money scheme. Each girl made herself a little bag with her number on it and the pocket money her father had sent was put inside with a small cash account book. On Saturday afternoons the bags which had been safely locked away all the week were issued and each girl went shopping. One teacher kept a shop where she sold text books, exercise books, rubbers, rulers, pencils, soap and postcards. The items bought were entered in the account book and the balance checked with the Patrol Leader. These account books could be inspected by the fathers and saved sending out bills for many small items and our hope was that the girls would get some sense of the value of money. I wonder how many have found

those little pocket money bags a useful training for future life in the management of their money.

Mariam Isaac and I were very keen to give the girls at our School some training for their future lives as wives and mothers. We planned a Domestic Science Syllabus to include Nutrition, Health, First Aid and Baby Care, and every form had one or two domestic science lessons a week. When later, Eileen Crowley, a trained nurse, was coming to teach once a week, she took a course with Form VI on Child Care including instruction on how a baby was born. But I was also much concerned with some girls who failed to get promotion from Form IV perhaps because of some weakness in Maths or English. We planned a Special Class for such girls who did not want to go on to College. It was to be a two year course including Diatetics, Practical Cooking, Home Nursing, Needlework, Music, English Conversation and Account Keeping. We decided to build a special room for this class with a cooking place and chimney. For some years we had a very good trained Domestic Science teacher, Achapilla Joseph (who later qualified as a doctor). I am sure those girls who joined the Special Class benefited by the practical training they received. But the fathers of most of these girls expected to arrange their marriages in the near future with the result that having started the year with ten students, we might find there were only three or four by the third term, which made it difficult to pay the salary of their teacher and few girls, if any, stayed on for a second year. More and more importance was attached to gaining the School Leaving Certificate so with fewer girls wishing to join, we had to give up the Special Class. Even the weekly Domestic Science lessons in the other classes had to be discontinued due to the pressure of other subjects, and now I wonder if girls get any training at school for their future lives when, even if they take up a career, they will almost certainly have to run a home and bring up children.

At that date in Travancore children from an Elementary School could either join a Vernacular School where the teaching was all in Malayalam or an English Medium Middle School with Forms I, II and III and pass on to Forms IV, V and VI in an English High School. The Christava Mahilalayam was to be a Middle and High School taking both boarders and day girls from about ten years old. When I went to Alwaye in 1929 permission had just been given to open Form V. The pupil whom I remember best who joined that form was K. M.



Saramma, the daughter of Mr. Mathulla Mappilay, who had been married when very young, had two children and now at 17 had been left a widow. She wisely decided to continue her education and we were able to receive her and little Kitty and Kunju as boarders. But the next year, with only four pupils to be promoted to Form VI, we could not get permission to open that form and had to find other schools to receive them. K. M. Saramma went on later to take her degree at the Women's Christian College and made a successful career as a teacher, bringing up her two children.

Her sister K. M. Aley (Chellamma) joined Form IV the year Saramma left. In that form I remember well and have a photograph of a very intelligent set of girls, all about the same height and age, all dressed in the traditional long white skirt and jacket with their hair done up in a neat little knot, Madhevikutty, Achamma, K. M. Aley, M. J. Baby, Saramma Joseph, K. R. Mariam, and M. V. Thankamma, and I am happy that I still correspond with four of them. M. J. Baby, with the curly hair and a mischievous twinkle in her eyes, who could not spell but was determined to get on, ended by marrying an enterprising Bombay business man and has most ably helped him run his business with whom I have often stayed in Bombay on my way to and fro from England. Saramma Joseph married and lived in Alwaye and sent her two daughters to the School. K. R. Mariam joined an Order of Sisters of Mercy, trained as a nurse and for many years was working as a Sister at the Alwaye General Hospital and took me to see the Home for Destitute Old People run by the devoted members of her Order. M. V. Thankamma and her elder sister M. V. Aley in Form V, were daughters of Mr. Varkey Tharakan, who in due course sent his seven daughters to the School. With M. V. Thankamma I have a long record of friendship, for after taking her degree at the Women's Christian College she came back to teach at the School till she married Dr. K. T. Jacob and took a post as Lecturer in Botany in Calcutta. But all those pupils of the early years, though I cannot write about them all, and have lost touch with some of them, were very dear to me, and it has been my joy to meet many of them again on my return visits to Alwaye.

It was a custom in England when I was a child for mothers to keep a special time in the evening to read to their children before they went to bed. So I used to invite the girls to come

to the library, which was my sitting room, to read to them and to play games with them in the evening. I would read a rather shortened version of some of the old English story books such as 'Feats on the Fiord' or Charlotte Yonge's 'Daisy Chain,' and I thought that the big May nineteenth century family were living a life not unlike that of some of the large families in Travancore. M. V. Thankamma remembers playing Snap and Happy Families and how Aleyamma, Chellamma and Baby used to shout 'Snap' and their voices still resound in her memory. Anna Punnoose remembers how they loved the evening chats in the library and enjoyed the readings which widened their horizons and improved their spoken English, though a few girls got into nooks and corners and slept soundly.

Friday evenings were given up to entertainments got up by different groups of girls (Fridays rather than Saturdays as the Syrian Christian Sunday observance began at 6 o'clock on Saturday evening). For Parents' Days and for a few entertainments which we put on at Alwaye and at Trichur in order to raise money, I generally got up a play in English, scenes in a simplified form from 'The Midsummer Night's Dream' or from 'The Merchant of Venice.' Some of the girls had considerable dramatic talent.



## VI

### I ATTEND A WEDDING

Mariam Isaac was one of the Women's Christian College graduates whom Miss Stevens had invited to join her as one of the first teachers of the new School. This twenty-three year old girl was one of the most beautiful women I have known. I compare her in my mind to the Egyptian Queen Nefertiti, the wife of Ikhnaten, with her slender figure, perfectly poised head, rather widely spaced eyes and wavy black hair. She had an expression of great sweetness and intelligence, was very self-possessed, rather reserved and did not often smile. She always wore the traditional dress of all Syrian Christian women, a fine white cotton cloth some five yards long folded to make a tight fitting skirt with an ingeniously pleated little fan at the back which was very becoming, a plain white jacket and a short white muslin sari which could be conveniently discarded in the house. She was a member of the Malankara Syrian Church and her religion expressed itself in a life of devoted and selfless service for others. As a young woman her lively idealistic spirit made her an interesting, if not always an easy, fellow worker. In the early days, the poverty and the difficulties the School had to face presented her with a challenge which she met with enthusiasm.

In 1930 Mariamma was married to P. K. Matthew. He had a son and a daughter, (who was a pupil at the School,) but his first wife had died. I have already told how he and A. A. Paul founded the School. He remained its devoted helper all his life. He was living near the School and, as secretary to the Governing Board, he helped us in many ways. He was a good architect and, using the local materials, designed and supervised the construction of all the School buildings. The stone was dug out of the quarries from the hillside. It was a reddish-brown stone called laterite which could be easily cut when moist but hardened into a solid stone except that the surface tended to crumble unless faced with plaster. Teams of coolie women would each carry a great laterite stone on her head from the quarries where the men were digging out the stones and shaping them, to the building sites on the hill top. The buildings were

all firmly based on the solid rock of the hill. For timber, Mr. Matthew himself went into the great forests on the mountains to choose and buy trees which were drawn down the hillsides by elephants and were then carried on carts pulled by pairs of oxen. The great trunks were then sawn into planks by two skilled men working with a double-handed saw, one on the trunk and one standing in a pit below. Tiles for roofing (and for floors when we could afford them) were obtained from the local Tile Factories. Only cement (needed for corners of rooms, sills and steps,) was difficult to obtain. Mr. Matthew personally supervised all the building operations. He had an excellent mason and a clever carpenter and wood carver who worked for him for years. He must have saved the school thousands of rupees by designing and supervising the buildings instead of putting the work out to a contractor. He took no remuneration except his meagre salary as secretary. He had planted some rubber trees on the sides of the hill. Later cashew-nut, mango and other fruit trees were planted round the School buildings, but the stony nature of the soil was not suitable for agriculture or gardening.

On Tuesday January 12th 1930 I attended the wedding of P. K. Matthew and Mariamma Isaac and wrote a long description of it to my mother. It took place at Akapparambu church, an old Syrian church standing in the middle of paddy fields a few miles north of Alwaye. In order to reach it, we had to cross two branches of the Periyar river by ferry, which was slow work, so that though we started at 5.30 we only reached the church about 7 a. m. to find the service well under way.

The ceremony was performed by a venerable Bishop with a long flowing white beard in multi-coloured vestments who chanted the service accompanied by the intoned responses of three black-robed priests. I was told that we had missed the blessing and giving of two gold rings. Just after we had arrived we saw the Bishop placing his hands on the bride's head in blessing, and putting a gold chain round her neck. Then the bridegroom standing behind the bride tied the *thali* on a white thread behind her neck and a beautiful new silk sari was placed over her head. The marriage service ends with the words, as I later learnt, "Behold from this time forward we entrust you each to the other," as the hands of the bridegroom and bride are joined together.



The wedding service was to be followed by the Holy Qurbana but in a short interval we all went outside, the Bishop walking to the Rest House under a huge crimson and gold-fringed umbrella. I was given breakfast, but all the congregation who would be attending the Qurbana had to fast. The church was packed partly by friends who had come to see the wedding and partly because, during the Qurbana, two young deacons were to be ordained as priests. With a long sermon from the Bishop the service lasted till afternoon having begun before seven.

At last the bride appeared surrounded by a little group of women friends and walked by a winding lane the quarter of a mile to her house with a large state umbrella of green silk held over her head and I was given an honoured place by her side. The bridegroom had gone by another route and was waiting for his bride at the entrance to the compound. On the threshold of the house bridegroom and bride stood side by side and were first greeted by an attendant who sprinkled them and all the wedding party with scented water. The bride's brother-in-law led the groom within and her sister led the bride (it would have been her father and mother had they been alive). The bridal pair were next seated side by side in a beautifully decorated *pandal* and brass trays were set before them with betel leaves and areka nuts and a dish of some sweetmeats of which they both ate a little.

Then the solemn rites over, the feasting began, the men eating in the *pandal*, the women indoors sitting on mats and eating off large plantain leaves with many and various kinds of curries served with mounds of rice. After a rest we were given an English tea. Then Mr. and Mrs. Matthew with all her relations and friends (his friends had all gone on ahead) set out in buses and cars for his family home, where all the ceremonies of welcome were repeated, the bridegroom's mother being the one to welcome them. Again we were feasted, this meal consisting of tea and cakes and various sweetmeats. About six we set off home.

It was a happy marriage. P. K. Matthew's quiet steady character was a great help to Mariamma. He understood her and admired her and gave her complete freedom to lead her life in her own way. They were both devoted to the School and gave it their unstinting service. She was a most-kind step-mother to George and Rani and a devoted mother to her own children, Kamala and Davy.

## VII

### THE UNION CHRISTIAN COLLEGE AND THE SETTLEMENT

Five miles away from the Christava Mahilalayam by road and much less by river, were the buildings of the Union Christian College situated on the bank of the Periyar on a similar hill to the one on which the School was built. I have already told in an earlier chapter how K. C. Chacko had shared with some of his students at the Madras Christian College his ideal of founding in Travancore a Union College where Christians belonging to different Churches would co-operate instead of several denominational colleges being set up in a spirit of rivalry.

In 1921 the Union Christian College was inaugurated at Alwaye. There were no funds to begin with but money came in gradually. The nucleus of the college staff was a Fellowship of Christians belonging to the Malankara Syrian and Mar Thoma Syrian Churches and to the Church of India, Burma and Ceylon, who not only accepted the work as a vocation to which they were called by God, but also agreed to function as a team unitedly waiting on God for guidance and making decisions corporately. The first members of this Fellowship were K. C. Chacko himself, A. M. Varki, V. M. Ittyerah and C. P. Mathew.

The College started with a Junior Intermediate Class of 64 students in an old three-story house but soon moved into its permanent home, a Taluk Cutchery building which was repaired and adapted for the purpose.

In 1924 Canon W. E. S. Holland, a C. M. S. missionary, joined the Fellowship and it was through his wife, Cecily, who had been a friend of mine in England, that I had first heard of Alwaye. But after the birth of twins the doctor forbade her further residence in the damp hot West Coast climate and Canon Holland decided to accept the post of Principal at St. John's College, Agra. When I came to Alwaye I found two



young Englishmen on the College staff, the Rev. Stephen Neill and Mr. Robins. As the services at the local C. M. S. church were all in Malayalam, it was pleasant for me to take a boat down the river in the cool of the early morning to attend a Holy Communion service in English in the little College Chapel and have breakfast afterwards with the young Englishmen, though less pleasant coming back up the river in the noonday heat.

Soon I had many friends at the College. The daughter of Mr. A. M. Varki, the Principal of the College, was a pupil at the School, and from then onwards a succession of the daughters and some of the sons of the College staff came to be educated at the Christava Mahilalayam. Some members of the College Fellowship were always members of our School Governing Board and later on, as I shall be telling, the greatest help was given to the School by some of the wives of the College professors. I felt the highest admiration for these men and their wives who led lives of such austere simplicity, men of high scholastic attainments who could have commanded good salaries elsewhere, yet were content to work for a mere subsistence remuneration in order to build up a Christian College. Their example was an inspiration to our little group of teachers and their friendship and love have been one of the great blessings of my life.

With the Alwaye Settlement also we had close connections. A leaflet describing the beginning of the Settlement written by Lester Hooper in 1932 states that there were 650,000 Outcastes in Travancore, (of whom 400,000 were Christians,) a small percentage of the 60 millions in India. The strictness of caste labels them, he wrote, as 'Unapproachables,' and 'Untouchables.' Some roads were closed to them. They could not enter the temples. They were often forbidden to draw water from the wells. I myself have seen an outcaste man hold his hand before his mouth, a gesture he had been enjoined to make lest his breath should pollute the person to whom he was speaking. Miss Ouwerkerk reports that the 1931 census defining the outcastes 'as those who have no right to enter temples' gives the number of such people as : 879,000 Ezhavas, a farming class closely connected with coconut cultivation and later to become a very important community, and 900,000 of other depressed classes, mostly farm labourers, poor and neglected.



The Staff—1930



Form IV—1930



Mariamma Matthew



Sosamma Daniel



P. K. Matthew



Miss E. T. Stevens (Centre) with two friends—1952





Netball—1931



K. M. Saramma with Kunju and Kutty—1929



Staff and Form VI—1933

Front Row: Hester Smith with P. C. Aley, M. C. Chinnama, C. P. Susy, P. C. Mariam,  
P. C. Achamma, M. C. Annamma (F. VI)  
Middle Row: Sosa Cherian, P. A. Mariam, K. C. Achamma, Soosamma Daniel, Thankamma Varkey,  
(Staff) P. T. Anna (F. VI) P. K. Mathev.  
Back Row: P. K. Kuryan, M. P. Chachy, Mariamma Matthew, C. Aleyamma, Anna Alexander,  
Sosa Abraham, Elizabeth Philipose, P. N. Ninan.

Great reform movements were on foot. Gandhiji had visited Travancore in 1924 and in 1936 when all Travancore temples were declared opened to them. But I can only tell of the work of a small group of Union Christian College students who were inspired to try to improve the lot of some of these poor people. Lester Hooper, a young Englishman who had been on the College staff from 1924—1926 used to go out with some of his Indian students to visit the miserable huts in which some of the outcaste people lived in the neighbourhood of the College in conditions of near-starvation, dirt and disease. In 1926 a group of four young men, one English and three Indians, Lester Hooper, M. V. George, K. J. John and P. T. Chacko, dedicated their lives to helping these poor outcastes. These four young men had no money, no land, no Missionary Society to back them. Lester returned to England to take his theological training and to be ordained. The others set out to collect money in India. With gifts from friends both in England and in India they were able to buy eleven acres of land on a hill half a mile away from the College. They decided to start with children, so the Alwaye Settlement began in the form of a boarding school for ten outcaste Christian boys in June 1927.

When Lester Hooper returned to India in 1930 he found three buildings, two cottages in each of which lived a worker and his family and ten outcaste boys and a school building in which two unmarried workers and seventeen boys were living. Besides the regular school subjects, the boys were taught all kinds of useful activities; prominence was also given to Scripture teaching and each cottage had its prayer room where the 'family' met for morning and evening devotions.

At the Christava Mahilalayam we were also getting to know our poor neighbours who lived in little huts round our hill, huts with walls of plaited palm leaves and with roofs thatched with leaves or straw, a sadly pitiful protection during the heavy monsoon rains. In the evenings our teachers and girls gathered some of the children together to teach them songs, tell them stories and to play games with them.

By 1931 we had decided to start a little school in an old wood-shed which we made habitable, and installed in residence there nine very poor little girls and a teacher, each child in a new little white skirt. They were to do all their own cooking and cleaning, to learn to read and write, to sing and play and hear Bible stories. In the evenings our girls helped to teach



them and played games with them. Sponsors were found for them largely by the help of Lester Hooper and the two Miss Debenhams who were already doing so much to promote the welfare of the Settlement boys. Incredibly £5 (about Rs. 65) a year was enough to support each child, providing food and clothes and part of the teacher's salary. One of these little girls went on finally to train as a doctor.

Our teachers and girls also continued to meet groups of local poor children on Sunday afternoons to tell Bible stories and to sing songs with them. In 1932 I have a record of a party for poor children, seven from the Little School, twelve from the Sunday groups and, with others, 53 in all. Each child was given food and a present, and for many years such a party before or after Christmas became a regular event.

In March 1932, before I left for England on my first furlough, I was talking over with Lester Hooper the building of one or two cottages for girls on a plot of land adjoining the School compound and we proposed handing over the management of our Little School to the Settlement, sponsors for girls as well as for boys being very largely found by the English Always Settlement Committee.

Lester was on furlough again in 1932 and he and his mother came to tea with me at my home and told me that he had got sponsors for ten of our little girls. He returned to India in September, full of hopes and plans, but soon after Christmas he got very ill with pneumonia and died on January 3rd.

## VIII

### THE GIRL GUIDES ATTEND THE MAHARAJAH'S INVESTITURE

I was a keen Girl Guide. In England I had started a village Guide Company and I had run two companies in the school where I was teaching. In Madras I had helped Miss Varley with an Indian Teachers' Cadet Corps. So when I went to Alwaye I began at once training some of the girls as Guides, and on March 20th 1929 I enrolled the first eleven Guides. Teachers as well as girls took the Tenderfoot test and were enrolled. By 1931 we had two School Companies with Sosamma Daniel as Captain and P. A. Mariamma as Lieutenant of the 1st Company, and Elizabeth Philipose as Captain and C. Saramma as Lieutenant of the 2nd Company, and a Flock of Bluebirds with Elizabeth Thomas as Flock Leader.

Very nice they looked in their uniform, according to Guide rules, the costume of the country in blue and white. As teachers and girls alike wore white skirts and jackets all that was needed was a *kavani* or short sari in dark blue, pinned to the shoulder by a long brooch with the Guide trefoil on it. Later we added dark blue haversacks on the shoulder straps on which could be stitched patrol emblems, leader's stripes etc.

As well as our regular weekly meetings for drill, games and passing Guides tests, knot tying, fire lighting, tracking and learning the Guide Laws, we organized the practical domestic and garden work of the School on a patrol system. Any boarder who did not want to be a Guide, was attached for practical work to one of the eight patrols into which the two Guide Companies were divided, and to each patrol were assigned certain duties, sweeping parts of the building or compound, keeping the Chapel clean and putting out books and mats for services, and waiting at meals. The different duties were each performed by a patrol for a week in an eight weekly rota and most of the work was done in a quarter of an hour

before breakfast—with a good supply of small brushes and little hoes it was surprising how much was done in a very short time. The patrols also acted as little families of older and younger girls into which a new girl could be welcomed and befriended.

Anna Joseph (Anna Punnoose) writing of her school days says, 'We were all Guides or Bluebirds. I have a vague feeling that I resented being made to promise loyalty to the King and having to sing "God save the King." We were all pretty stirred up by the Satyagraha movement of Gandhiji at that time and sported a little khadar among our clothing but I am ashamed to recall that was as far as our nationalism took us. (Of course when Scouts and Guides became "The Bharat Scouts and Guides," the promises of loyalty were made "to God and my Country.") Anna continues, 'We looked forward to our trips to Ernakulam and Balkatty for rallies. A trip to Trivandrum in 1931 for the Investiture of our young Maharajah was what a world tour would be like for youngsters today.'

But before I describe the doings of that memorable outing I must write something about the Travancore Ruling Family. They claimed to be Kshatryas and in the 18th century were the rulers of the little Kingdom of Venad which Martanda Varma expanded into the State of Travancore. His descendants ruled wisely, the Rajah ruling through a Diwan who was the head of the administration.

A trade treaty was made with the East India Company and when Tippoo Sultan invaded Travancore in 1789 the English helped this State and made further treaties with the rulers of Travancore and Cochin. In the treaty of 1805, the East India Company, in return for undertaking to defend the Rajah and his State, demanded an annual payment of 8 lakhs of rupees and that a British Resident at the Rajah's court should advise him 'on financial matters, in the administration of justice and in the advancement of His Highness' interests and the happiness of his people.' The second of these residents, Colonel Munro, was so wise and popular that he was made Diwan of Travancore and Cochin and under his administration the country prospered. In 1806 the title of Maharajah was conferred on the Rajah.

The Ruling Family was matriarchal: the Head of the Family was the Senior Rani. The family estate was at Attingal and the Royal Princes were those whose mothers were Princesses



of the Attingal family. The eldest male member was the Maharajah who ruled Travancore. For forty years, from 1885 to 1924, Sri Mulam Thirunal, a wise and progressive Maharajah, was the ruler. He instituted in 1888 a Legislative Council of 8 members (later increased to 50 members) to draw up draft legislation for submission to His Highness, and in 1904 a Popular Assembly of 100 members, presided over by the Diwan, to bring the needs of the country before the Government.

The wise old Maharajah died in 1924 and was succeeded by Sri Chitra Thirunal, a boy of 12. The old Maharajah, having no sisters, had adopted as nieces two girls from a collateral branch of his family who became the Senior Maharani and the Junior Maharani. They were educated by a remarkable Catholic Eurasian woman, Miss Watts. The Senior Maharani had only daughters but the Junior Maharani had a son and a daughter, so it was her son who became the Maharajah in 1924 and her daughter, if married before the Senior Maharani's daughters, who would be the mother of the next Maharajah. The Senior Maharani became Regent until the young Maharajah was invested with full powers just before his 19th birthday. The Senior Maharani had ruled wisely, and Maurice Watts, whom she had appointed as Diwan, in opening the Popular Assembly in 1928 could speak of 'Tranquil Travancore.'

The young Maharajah was the Chief Scout and his sister the Chief Guide, and it was to the ceremony of his Investiture that all the Scouts and Guides in the State were bidden to be present.

I quote from the letter I wrote to my family on Nov. 10th 1931:— On November 5th, before it was light, 26 of my young maidens with four teachers and Mr. Matthew climbed into two buses, the young things in their Guide uniform and all agog with excitement, many of them never having been to Trivandrum before. It is a pretty long run of 160 miles and the buses don't go more than 15 miles an hour and this speed is diminished by a number of minor halts, police checks, toll gates etc. We broke the journey for pleasant wayside picnics at nine and five and spent two hours at noon at the Syrian Church School at Tiruvella for a meal. The soft evening light had long faded into night's darkness before we reached Trivandrum and drove into the spacious quiet compound of the London Mission hostel where the Guides were to stay. There,

for the incredibly small sum of Re. 1/- a head for 3 days, they had lodging and three meals a day. The bus fare was Rs. 6/- a head for the return journey, including going about as much as we wanted in Trivandrum.

On Friday there was a rehearsal for Scouts and Guides at seven and then we spent the rest of the morning sight-seeing. The main ceremony of the day was to be held at the Durbar Hall in the Hozoor Catchery, or State Offices, when the Resident on behalf of the Viceroy would give over full authority to the young Maharajah and the Maharani Regent would resign her powers. The Scouts and Guides were allotted places round a semi-circular drive approaching the main entrance of the building. First we watched the highly decorative bodyguard arriving, some forty mounted soldiers in dark blue uniform with fine blue striped pugarees. The Nair Brigade were a gay sight in red coats. Next came nine State elephants in enormous frilled cloths of red, yellow and green. Then came the royal horses led by their grooms. Various detachments of picturesque palace guards and attendants followed, one set in lemon-coloured trousers and turbans and then probably the ancient Temple Guard wearing only white cloths from the waist, gold and crimson head dresses and with long curved swords slung from their naked shoulders by narrow gold and crimson bands. The State Army and elephants took up their stations in front of the main entrance while the sundry palace guards went into the hall.

Meanwhile we were watching the arrival of various guests, Indian and British. Then came the arrival of the really important people mostly in open landaus or in closed broughams with gorgeous coachmen on the boxes, first the members of the Royal Family, the husbands of the Maharani Regent and of the Maharajah's mother, both quite unimportant people, then the Maharajah's sister who is very important, as it will be her son who will be the next Maharajah, and with her the Maharajah's mother. Then the Maharani Regent in a grand equipage, a coachman and footmen in emerald green and lemon with out-runners waving horsehair whisks. Then the Maharajah himself in a stately closed carriage with emerald green liveried coachman, footmen and out-runners. I caught a glimpse of a young dark face with a pearl-covered turban and coat. Last and most important of all, as representing the Viceroy, came the Resident and Mrs. Pritchard in an open carriage.

There was then a pause during which we sat on the grass and hoped the inky black cloud would not descend in torrents of rain. Instead, a fine rainbow arched over the Durbar Hall as if the sky were hanging out its own decoration. Various salutes were fired before the Maharajah came to the entrance and read some declaration which we could not hear, and then it was all over.

The evening torchlight procession was the great popular event of the day and our Guides, hoisted on the top of our buses parked behind the mission compound wall, saw it all splendidly. When the procession was nearing, rows of little lights on either side of the road were lit up. Presently in the distance we saw something high up in the air blotting out the lights; it was the howdahs of the elephants. These great creatures were followed by all the soldiers marching to a band with blazing lights carried on either side. Lastly a marvellous gold and jewelled coach with the Maharajah seated on a high throne inside it was the most fairy-tale carriage I have ever seen! More carriages followed.

On Saturday was the Scout and Guide Rally. I inspected a very smartly turned out Company. The rally consisted of the usual march past, displays of bridge and hut building by the Scouts, the unveiling of the Maharajah's portrait for Scout Headquarters by Sir C. P. Ramaswami Aiyar, who had been appointed as personal adviser to the young Maharajah, a clever man but I don't like what I hear of him. He was a great friend of the Willingdons and was responsible for organising this Investiture. I believe Lord Irwin was doing all he could to delay it and to leave the country under the wise rule of the Maharani Regent.

The Maharajah, as Chief Scout, and his sister, as Chief Guide, inspected the Scout and Guide Companies, so every one had a close view of him. One of our Guides was heard murmuring, "My Maharajah." After that the rain descended and the camp fire and the songs we had been practising had to be cancelled.

On Sunday afternoon a happy time was spent on the beach ending with a visit to Elizabeth Thomas, now Mrs. Chacko. On Monday we started at 4 a. m. but did not get home till 9. 30 p. m. I was relieved to have got all the party home again without accident or loss. We had indeed had a splendid and interesting time,



## IX

### VISITORS AND VISITS

Although I was the only English woman living in the School I found such friends and good companions among the staff that I never felt lonely, and I also had many visitors. The Travancore missionaries were all very kind to me; I remember especially the friendly visits of Miss Davis, the Mothers' Union worker, and when I went to Kottayam, Miss Meager, Headmistress of the Baker Memorial School, gave me much valuable advice. It was she who recommended P. N. Ninan, who came first as a Maths teacher in 1930 for a year while Mariamma Matthew went to take her teacher's training at St. Christophers, and then stayed on for many years as Maths and Malayalam teacher and as Writer and Bursar.

Friends from Madras came to stay, Miss E. T. Stevens and Miss D. J. Stephen, Miss McDougall and Miss Barne from St. Ebba's; all of them brought fresh inspiration. Miss Barne made delightful sketches and encouraged the children in their Art work. I have told in another chapter about our Girl Guide Companies; we received much help from Miss Hillbrook, the Guide trainer, and from Mrs. Shackle, our Commissioner. The young Englishmen from the College came over to tea, and to my delight on March 25th 1931, Brian Crowley married Eileen Hill who had been a missionary nurse in North India. Soon she was bicycling over from the College once a week to spend the day at the School to teach Home Science and Baby Care. When the Crowleys got their own little house, I always had a home where I was welcome and the Crowleys have been my friends ever since. Their small bungalow was built by a gift from Dr. Lindsay, Master of Balliol College, Oxford, who had been visiting Indian colleges and when the Calcutta University gave him Rs. 2000 after a lecture on Plato, he had donated it to the U. C. College to build the Crowleys' house. Eileen Crowley soon began helping the College students when they were sick and then founded the Rural Medical Mission and installed there V. E. Mathai as dispenser to meet the medical needs of the

College students and as a place where the poor of the neighbourhood could come with their aches and pains and get advice and treatment.

In 1929 my sister Dorothy came to India to visit me. In a letter to my mother of December 1st I wrote of my excitement at the prospect of meeting her at Alwaye railway station. 'At last Dorothy is here, the train was very late, due at 12.24 it did not get in till after one. Then it came and she was putting her head out of the window and saw me at once. I was able to leap into the carriage and give her one sticky kiss before we had to pull out her luggage, deal with tickets, and porters, pile all the boxes into the bus and set out holding each other's hands. The arrival at the School was great fun—all the teachers and children were assembled; on the doorstep the word Welcome was written in flowers and the smallest child had a garland and a posy to present.'

We went together to Madras for the Christmas holidays and Dorothy then paid some visits to other friends, returning to Alwaye on February 7th. Alack, she had collected a dengue germ on her travels which spoilt the next week of her visit. Apart from my joy at having her, she increased my comfort, for she deplored that my corner room had no view of the mountains and paid for a small open-sided room to be built where now stands the Hester Cottage. I could then sleep out there in hot weather and eat my meals looking out at the glorious view.

Dorothy's visit added much to the gaiety of the School. She had brought out with her the records of the English Country Dances and we began teaching them to the children with their gay tunes and simple steps and, with the dancers weaving graceful patterns they were not unlike some of the Travancore country dances, such as the rice-planting dance. Anyhow, both the teachers and children enjoyed them. Sometimes we danced on the hill top in the moonlight and afterwards when Dorothy left I continued to hold regular dancing classes in the early mornings. Some of the girls became quite expert dancers and we used to exhibit some of the dances at any entertainment that we organized. I think some of the Old Girls will remember my sister Dorothy and our moonlight dances on the hill.

Then Dorothy was very good at accounts and was the greatest help to me in sorting out the rather confusing accounts that had been kept during the first years of the School.

We spent a very happy holiday together in the hills at Kodaikanal before my sister left to stay with friends in East Africa.

In February 1931 my aunt Louise, Mrs. Luard, came on a winter trip to India. She was only fifteen years older than I was and had always been a much loved companion as well as an aunt. She was my father's youngest sister and had married rather late in life a Captain Luard. It was a most happy marriage though they had no children. Most sadly he was killed in 1916 during the First World War. After a time of great grief, my aunt had taken up an active life of public service. She was also a great traveller and generally managed a visit abroad each year. She was welcome wherever she went as she was full of energy, interest and cheerfulness. I gave up my bedroom to her and slept in the outdoor room and she seemed quite content to stay for a short time in my simple quarters. I took her to see all the neighbouring sights including the Siva Ratri Festival on the banks of the Periyar river. Siva Ratri is essentially a religious festival in honour of the Hindu god Siva but is also a great fair. It was an amazing sight with blazing lights along the river bank and countless little stalls with every fascinating variety of merchandise, fruits and vegetables and sweetmeats, brass and aluminium vessels, jewelry, trays and boxes of rosewood inlaid with ivory or silver, china cups and saucers, cloth and silks and scarves and saris of every hue and colour, with great crowds milling around and elephants here and there and drums beating.

The busy life during term time in a residential school is made up for by the long holidays. I used to get away whenever possible from the hot damp Alwaye climate. During the long spring holiday I joined friends in the hills at Ootacamund or Kodaikanal where the climate is like a cool English summer, and I made two memorable trips during the Christmas holidays, in 1930 to stay with Carol Graham at Dornakal and to go camping with her, and in 1931 to Agra to stay with Canon and Cecily Holland and to see the Taj Mahal and Fatepur Sikri. But this book is not about my travels.



However I must tell of my visit to Delhi as that concerned the School. The members of the School Governing Board were very anxious that I should go on from Agra to Delhi and see Lady Willingdon. Lord Willingdon was now the Viceroy and they were both friends of the Junior Maharani of Travancore. It was hoped that I might persuade Lady Willingdon to write to the Maharani and commend our School to her. So I went on to stay with Susan Lister who was working with the Cambridge Mission. On January 6th I drove over from Old Delhi to New Delhi, feeling rather frightened but quite presentable in a new hat and white gloves. As I approached the fine recently built Viceregal Lodge, I was challenged by crimson and gold uniformed guards who verified my name from a list of expected guests. At the entrance I was met by a tall aide-de-camp who entertained me until Her Excellency was ready to receive me. We were sitting in a lovely room furnished with a sea green carpet and hangings, and great bowls of pink and yellow roses. When Her Excellency appeared, I dropped the correct curtsy, as the Vicereine represents the Queen. She was a little fashionably dressed lady wearing a hat and a rope of pearls. It was quite easy for me as she talked so much herself; after a few questions about my School she spoke of politics. I think the Viceroy had again recently sent Gandhiji to prison and she felt he was right in taking a strong action. After hearing the Indian point of view from the Hollands, I was interested to hear the Viceregal side with which I inwardly disagreed. I felt happier when she spoke of how keen the Viceroy was to press on with the reforms and that India really knew he was their friend (half India perhaps, I thought, but there will be another half who will loathe and detest him and I thought that Lord Irwin's patience would have won through to something better than this). Then we returned to talk about the School and she promised to write to the Travancore Maharani, so I got what I wanted. She handed me over to a magnificent Indian chaprassi who showed me over the house and exquisite gardens where many young trees had been recently planted.

I followed up my interview with Lady Willingdon in February by calling on the Junior Maharani at Trivandrum. The mail bus by which I had intended to travel by day, failed for some reason to pick me up, so I decided to travel by night in order to keep my appointment the following morning. I started at 7 p. m. and walked into Alwaye with a cooli carrying a deck chair and my tiffin basket and Markose my butler with a

cushion and a lantern, then on by train to Ernakulam and by rickshaw to the night boat to Alleppey where I arrived at 4. 30 a. m. Another rickshaw took me to the Travellers' Bungalow and here I rested and had breakfast. Then on by bus to Quilon and another bus on to Trivandrum and a little jutka to the Fern Hill Bungalow where I was staying. I seem to have used every possible means of conveyance, foot, train, rickshaw, boat, bus and horse-drawn jutka, but anyhow I managed to keep my appointment to see the Maharani at 8.30 that morning.

The Junior Maharani, as the Maharajah's mother, was really the most important person in the State. The new palace was a pleasant modern bungalow with a well-kept garden. A stout elderly butler showed me into a pretty drawing room where I found a little lady dressed in the simplest of clothes, a little white jacket with a white lawn cloth edged with gold folded to form a skirt; she wore no jewels apart from two gold bangles. My Governing Board had instructed me to ask for a grant of some 120 acres of land from the Forest Department which we could let out for cultivation and which would thus bring in some regular income to the School. She seemed to like the idea, and said we must apply to the Dewan.

We must have done so as I have a note that the Dewan, Mr. Austin, came to see the School on April 5th but as far as I can remember, nothing came of all my efforts. But I had two interesting interviews with the Vicereine in Delhi and with the Maharani in Trivandrum.

## X

### TRANQUIL TRAVANCORE

When the Diwan opened the Popular Assembly in 1928 he could speak of 'Tranquil Travancore.' And it did indeed seem a peaceful country. There was little anti-British feeling in this Native State where the British were represented only by a Resident at the court of the Maharajah and as far as I could see, no British troops were stationed. There were some small English business communities in the towns and there were a few English coffee and tea planters on the hills. The missionaries who worked with the Indians as doctors and teachers, were much loved and respected. The country land-owners lived mainly on the produce of their own estates. In the little market towns all the local products were sold, rice, spices of all kinds, tapioca and a few vegetables, pineapples and plantains. Of course there were lawyers and bankers but few very rich people. There were many skilled craftsmen, carpenters, masons, workers in brass, silver and ivory. In another chapter I have written of the great outcaste community, labourers on the land who were terribly poor but who accepted their lot with patient resignation.

On August 19th 1929 I noted in my diary that the date on the Malayalam calendar was Chingam 3, 1105 M. E. (Malayalam Era) and the new year had just begun on the 1st of Chingam, the month of the Lion. To live in the year 1105 gave me a feeling of living in the Middle Ages. The Malayalam months were named after the signs of the Zodiac and I could always remember their order by this little rhyme :—

The Ram, the Bull, the Heavenly Twins,  
The next the Crab the Lion shines,  
The Virgin and the Scales,  
The Scorpion, Archer and He-goat,  
The Man that bears the Watering Pot,  
The Fish with shining scales.

The Malayalam months started about the middle of the English months and on the calendars the English dates were printed in small numerals under the big Malayalam dates.



had received an anonymous gift of Rs. 10,000 and later another Rs. 5,000 and P. K. Matthew had bought from the Church Missionary Society 34 acres of land for Rs. 2,000 as well as land for a road link with the Alwaye-Perumpavoor road and had constructed the School buildings which I have already described, but there was no money left to finish the buildings. The payment of the teachers' salaries and any other expenses had to be met out of the school fees and a very small annual Government grant. The High School fees were Rs. 6/- a month and Middle School Rs. 3/-. A trained graduate's salary was Rs 50 a month, the undergraduate's salaries were Rs. 18—25, out of which teachers paid the same boarding fees as the children. But with our small number of pupils I was often in great difficulty as to how I could pay the teachers' salaries on the first of each month when they were due. Mariamma and a little group of girls would go to the Chapel and pray about this, and by God's providence some unexpected gift would arrive and I never failed while I was Headmistress to pay the salaries on the right date. I remember on one occasion Sosamma Daniel and I sitting at the end of a term on either side of a table with our little tin cash box between us containing a few small coins which were our total School wealth and wondering how we should pay the teachers when they returned at the beginning of the next term. My own salary of Rs. 120 a month I could only take some months, but I had a small private income and my parents sent me an occasional present, so I managed.

P. K. Matthew went about collecting money for the building and I was always begging a visitor or visiting parent for Rs. 20 to tile the floor of one class room.

The spending of every chackram was a consideration but we were all young and hopeful and had faith in God.



The Group  
1950



V. M. Ittyerah and Anna Ittyerah with their Children  
1955



Play Time





Sunday Evening



Staff March 1962

Back Row: Annamma Jacob, K. J. Rachel, Santha Thomas, Susy Mathew, Omana Thomas, Thangamma Mani, Mary Jacob, Jayamma Kurien.  
 Middle Row: Saramma Thommen. Rebecca Mathew, K. V. Annamma, K. Mariamma, Elmy Abraham, Susy John, Chinnamma Mathai, L. Menardier, K. M. Annakutty, Thangi Korula.  
 Front Row: Mr. Narayana Moosath, Mr. Niran, C. Peyer, Mariamma Mathew, Hester Smith, Aleyamma Gheeverghese, Achamma Mathen, Gracey Thomas, Sosamma Chandy.

## XI

### AN EVENTFUL LAST TERM

After nearly five years in India, I was planning in April 1932 to return for a year to England. My last term was quite an eventful one.

On the 24th of January the four little girls, T. A. Esther, M. S. Mary, Elizabeth Joshua and Sara Cherian, whom I had been preparing, were confirmed by our Bishop in our own Chapel at 5 o'clock after school. I wrote in a letter, 'It was a really lovely time of day with floods of golden sunlight streaming into the Chapel and making the Bishop's vermilion robe glow a most brilliant colour against the blue hangings. I always feel glad when the dear children become full members of the Church with such power and strength to help them. Now I must prepare them for the Holy Communion.' Over forty years later, Esther reminded me in a letter how I had shown them the picture in Hole's "Jesus of Nazareth" of a Holy Communion service in a church with a great fresco of our Lord over the altar so depicted that He seemed visibly present and she wrote that she had constantly thought of this at Holy Communion throughout her life. On February 17th the Rev. W. Oommen, our Always pastor, took the Communion service in our Chapel at which the newly confirmed made their first Communion. We had quite a nice little congregation of about twenty including some neighbours and the Mar Thoma teachers and girls, as their Church is in communion with the Anglican Church, and also my butler Markose, a most regular and devout church goer.

Then I was much concerned because our Jacobite girls so seldom took the Sacrament (though they attended the Qurbana most Sundays), because they could only do so after confession. So we arranged for a Jacobite priest to take a day's Retreat for the staff and girls, to hear confessions and to celebrate the Qurbana the next morning in the Chapel.



Till this time we had been wonderfully free from any epidemic or serious illness, but one of the girls, M. P. Mariam, developed typhoid. She was sent to hospital and after some days of great anxiety we heard she was out of danger, and thank God she recovered. But I was much troubled lest any of the teachers or girls should have taken the infection. We got everyone inoculated and in my eagerness to disinfect the water supply, put so much potassium permanganate down the well that for days afterwards the water was bright pink!

Then a whooping cough epidemic started. I always remember how a Patrol Leader, I think it was M. J. Baby, caught it from one of her little Guides whom she had gone to look after when the child had a coughing attack in the night (not yet diagnosed as whooping cough). At one time there were about twenty children in various states of suspicion or complete coughers and, as an ordinary cold was also running through the School, it was difficult to know who had got it and whose coughs were only sympathetic. Finally we decided to close the School and by March 5th all the children had gone home except the girls in Form VI, for the most important event of the term was that we were able to present our first candidates for the English School Leaving Examination, a public examination at the end of the High School course giving entrance to college. I have a photograph of the girls taken with myself and Mrs. Daniel, Grace Punnen, N. Mariam Joseph, K. M. Aleyamma, K. R. Mariam, M. V. Thankamma and M. V. Aleyamma. K. M. Aley was one of those who had had the whooping cough and we were in some doubt whether she was sufficiently free of infection, but finally decided it would be all right for her to sit for the exam.

Another anxious moment occurred on the night before the examination began of which M. V. Thankamma has reminded me. In the middle of the night a girl came running to me, "Thankamma has been bitten by a scorpion," she cried. I rushed to her and the great brute was still on the floor beside her. I seized a big dictionary and dropped it on the scorpion to kill it and then looked up in a medical book for any possible remedy I could apply. I sat watching the child fearing that at any moment she would begin to feel an excruciating pain which might last for twenty-four hours. But she continued smiling and felt nothing. Afterwards I learnt that it is the sting of the little scorpion which is so painful but the sting of the large scorpion is harmless.

Meanwhile I was busy handing over the School affairs to Sosamma Daniel, who was to be the acting headmistress in my absence, and all the account keeping to P. N. Ninan who was now appointed Bursar and who had already been doing most of the account keeping during the past year. The last weeks were not quite as hectic as they might have been as I had only the Form VI lessons to take. We did country dancing in the early mornings to give teachers and girls some exercise and bathed in the river in the evenings.

On March 30th the five girls went into Alwaye to begin their examination and Sosamma and I went with them but I had only to go in on two other days to identify them. By April 5th their examination was over and the next day I had to say good-bye to my dear children.

I had planned to travel with Carol Graham, who was also going home on her first furlough after five years as a Mothers' Union Worker, so we were both very excited. We met in Bombay and sailed on the Victoria, a Lloyd Triestino boat, on April 11th. The return fare by tourist class to Genoa was £43 and I reckoned that it cost me only £50 from Alwaye to London. I arrived at Victoria Station on that or on some other occasion with only a few shillings and hoped my parents would be there to meet me, which of course they were.

After a happy year at home and having recovered from the fatigues of the Alwaye climate, I returned to India on May 8th 1933 hoping to take up my work again at the Mahilalayam, though my Mother was very sad at losing me and I had promised her not to stay more than two years. I wrote in my diary, 'It is lovely to be back again.'

But soon after my return, to my very great sorrow, I got a cable telling me that my Mother had died on June the 10th after only a few days of illness. As the eldest daughter I had always promised my father that I would come and live with him if ever my mother died, so I decided that I must return to England. It seemed a right decision because of the responsible way Sosamma Daniel had acted as Headmistress during my year in England and because the original plan was that the School should have an Indian headmistress. But it was a great grief to me to leave the School and the work I loved. After staying one term to set everything in order, and the Governing Board having appointed Mrs. Daniel as Headmistress, I said good-bye on September 2nd not thinking ever to return again.

## XII

1947

When I returned to England in 1933 I had no idea that I should ever go back to Alwaye. I continued to correspond with my Indian friends but it was only at a later date that I learnt about much which had happened at the school after I had left.

Sosamma Daniel continued as a very efficient Headmistress and in November 1934 Sally Coey, an Irish Quaker with high qualifications in literature, joined the staff. She was a great help as an English teacher. In 1935 she was asked to preside at the All India Women's Conference in Trivandrum in which the Junior Maharani took a great interest. P. K. Matthew and Miss Coey arranged to pay courtesy calls on the Maharani, the Maharajah and on the Dewan and were able to interest them in the School and obtained a Government grant towards the building of a cottage hostel. It was built for just over Rs. 5000 and later we named it the Sally Cottage in memory of Miss Coey. In 1936 Sally's father died and she had to return to England. We were very sorry to hear of her own death in 1949.

Sally Coey had interested her friend Miss Jessie Chapman in the School and in 1935 the School Social Service League invited her to come and help them to start a dispensary to benefit the poor people of the neighbourhood. Miss Chapman was a trained nurse who had already been working for a time in North India. A small dispensary was built and Miss Chapman was soon treating a number of patients, the teachers and children helping and collecting the money to buy the medicines. Miss Chapman also taught Hygiene, Home Nursing and First Aid to the Home Science classes and Scripture to them and to Form VI. She leased a piece of land from the School on which she built herself a small bungalow.

In order that Sosamma Daniel might continue her work as Headmistress, her husband, Father Daniel, had come to live



near the School with their two boys who became pupils at the School and from then on small boys, and especially brothers of the girls, were admitted to the Middle School. In 1943 Sosamma's husband died and she was for a time in poor health herself and felt it difficult to continue her work as Headmistress. P. N. Ninan, who had been Bursar since I left, took up an appointment in his Church. A Miss Annamma Cheryan was appointed as Headmistress and Bursar in May 1944 but suddenly left in October of the same year and a retired Headmaster, a friend of A. A. Paul's and P. K. Matthew's, took over as Headmaster until in June 1947 Mariamma Matthew was appointed as Headmistress.

The most serious situation facing the School was the state of its always precarious finances. Mr. Mathew has told the full story of these difficulties in his little book. The general economic depression preceding the World War (1939—1945) had affected the School. Various Indian and English friends had put money into a *Chitty* which it was hoped would bring some income to the School, but it ran into difficulties, and when it was terminated in 1939, Rs. 15,000 were owing to subscribers. Some members of the Governing Board were considering the closing of the School and selling the land assets to pay the money that was owing.

Many were praying and working in the hope that the School could be saved of whom P. K. Matthew, the School Secretary, was the most concerned and active. At the School three senior teachers, Sosamma Daniel, Mariamma Matthew and Elizabeth Gheevarghese, were meeting and praying together, and at the U. C. College three wives of college professors were inspired by K. C. Chacko (one of the founders of the College) to do what was in their power to help the School. These two sets of friends met and decided that they should take up the great responsibility of running the School. At a Governing Board meeting on February 1946 Anna Ittyerah, one of the College wives, proposed to form a Group to take over the internal running of the School, meeting all current expenses. The Governing Board accepted her offer and set to work to collect money to clear all debts. Miss Chapman bought the piece of land she had been leasing which had already made it possible to come to terms with the chief creditor.

I had gone home to live with my father, but he was anxious that I should not give up my work as a teacher and agreed

to move from his Gloucestershire home to a house near the Downe House School where I had taught for two years when I first left College and had now been offered a post as Scripture specialist. My sister Dorothy was also living at home. She had been ill and I had nursed her after a serious internal operation. In 1939 my father died just before the outbreak of the second World War. During the war my sister and I both did some war work and I had an operation from which I took a long time to recover, but in 1945 I was determined to get back to teaching so I took a post at the Winchester County School. It was there that in the autumn of 1946 I received a letter from Father V. C. Gheevarghese who was then the Christava Mahilalayam Secretary to ask if I would return to Alwaye and join the newly formed Group. My father had died, my sister seemed in better health, and having had a flat in London while working at the Censor's Department during the war, decided that she would like to live in London, and finally bought 35 Gloucester Avenue where she planned to live in one flat and let the three other flats. So we sold our house near the Downe House School and moved the furniture we needed to furnish two flats at Gloucester Avenue, thinking that one day when I retired from India I would perhaps occupy the Garden Flat but it was let for the present to some young cousins.

I was 52 but I thought that I could give at least two years service to the Mahilalayam so I gave notice to leave the Winchester School at the end of the summer term and wrote to say that I would come out to India in the autumn. But before I arrived at Alwaye two great events had taken place.

On the 15th of August 1947 India had become independent. I have written nothing about the great agitation movement led by Gandhiji because it hardly affected Travancore or the community among which I was working 1929—1933. I had followed with great interest all the events which led to Independence during the fourteen years when I was in England but this little book is no place to write about them.

The other great event was that, after years of negotiations, the Anglicans in South India had united with the Presbyterian, Congregational and Methodist Churches to form The Church of South India.

But while I was packing up and planning my return journey, I was alarmed by the accounts in the newspapers of massacres in India and felt fearful about returning to Alwaye. However I was encouraged and reassured by my friend Bishop Loyd who had been Bishop of Nasik. So I started off, sailing from Liverpool on November 17th and arriving at Alwaye, after a short stay in Madras, on December 13th to be most kindly welcomed at the School.

I found that, except for the building of the Sally Cottage there had been no money to improve or repair the buildings. The walls were still unplastered, matting tatties still covered the windows on two sides, and there was not a scrap of paint anywhere. Because of the shortage of cotton cloth, the children were wearing skirts and jackets of any material available and the number of pupils, about 160, was still too small for the fees they paid to meet the expense of the teachers' salaries. But there was a great spirit of hope since the formation of the Group and nearly all the money owing to the Chitty subscribers had been repaid, some of them having generously cancelled the debt owing to them. My old friends Sosamma Daniel, Mariamma Matthew, Elizabeth Gheevarghese, and P. K. Matthew too, greeted me most affectionately.

The School Social Service Club had found it difficult with rising costs to raise money for the medicines needed at the Dispensary. Local missionaries had more than once suggested that Jessie Chapman should join the Church Missionary Society, so eventually she offered her services and was accepted by that Society. She was sent to work at a hill station some 50 miles away from Alwaye. She most generously gave back some of the land she had bought to the School and most kindly lent her bungalow to me and to Mrs. Daniel, coming occasionally to spend a few days there herself. So now I had a pleasant house to live in. I was especially delighted by the wide verandah with a lovely view.

My butler, Markose, who had been working for both Miss Coey and for Miss Chapman, stayed on to cook and wait on me. There was a good little separate building with a kitchen, storeroom and bedroom for him. Markose was married and had several children, but his wife was a teacher at a Chalakudi school and they had a house there so Markose often went home



or his wife came to visit him at the Mahilalayam. No one could have had a more devoted or a more faithful servant. He stayed on with me till I retired. He was a devout Christian and would walk into Alwaye to Church every Sunday unless we had a C. S. I. service in our Chapel or I hired a car to take myself, him and some children to church on the first Sunday of the month.

So I joined the Group, knowing that we had much work before us in order to build up the School, but were full of hope and faith in God.

### XIII

#### THE GROUP

I soon settled down in the spacious bungalow, but was finding it fearfully hot, nearly 90°F. by day and never less than 76° at night. I took a little time to reacclimatise to the Always heat, but the installation of electric light with the electric fan the teachers had provided for me was a great improvement on the hot and smelly oil lamps of my previous years at the Mahilalayam.

Now I must write about the Group. Every Tuesday afternoon we met in my bungalow. One of us in turn led a short devotion and then we talked over any matter concerning the School that needed to be decided, from the buying of a new vessel for the kitchen to our next effort to collect money or the appointment of a new teacher. We conducted our meetings in English for my benefit as the other members of the Group spoke English as fluently as I did (I had never got very far in learning Malayalam and by now had forgotten, or almost forgotten, the little I did know). But when it came to discussing a kitchen affair they relapsed into Malayalam. If we could not come to a common mind on any matter, which was rare, the question was postponed for further consideration and discussed again at our next meeting.

I can see them all so clearly in my mind's eye sitting round in basket chairs or on the settee. I wrote to my sister describing them all:—Mariamma Matthew makes a most beautiful and stately Headmistress, she has cut her curly hair short which suits her, she is still slight with a graceful figure and carries on the administration of the School with great efficiency. Sosamma Daniel, so calm and wise and good, is not at all strong and gets painful bouts of rheumatism. She teaches English and Geography and as Bursar keeps the accounts with meticulous care and accuracy. Elizabeth Gheevarghese who is the Warden is a dear and delightful woman who cares with real love for all the boarders. Then there are the three wives from the College who

have been coming over to teach on two or three days a week without any salary—Anna Ittyerah, quite charming and rather lovely, very sweet and quiet in manner, a most competent English teacher who took her teacher's training at Oxford, tall Grace Thomas, a most reliable person of good balanced judgment, Anna Joseph, commonly known as Baby, none other than the Anna Punnoose who joined the school as a 12 year-old in 1929 and is now married to Deacon K. C. Joseph and has a little three year old daughter. She is still round-faced, cheerful and amusing and knows her own mind; as the youngest member of the Group she is valuable in keeping us older ones up to the mark. I had been greatly impressed by the courage and devotion with which the Group had practically saved the School from being closed and were still carrying on at considerable self-sacrifice. I could not have had more delightful colleagues to work with.

I was appointed as honorary Principal. A Board Member had offered to pay my salary when I was invited to return, but as I could now afford to do so, I was able to offer my services on an honorary basis. The Headmistress was of course in charge of all the educational and administrative work and the Bursar of all the finances of the School. The Warden was responsible for the boarders. My main duty was to teach English, generally to have an eye on the compound and buildings and as a Group member, to share in all decisions concerning the running of the School. My position as Principal was useful when I attended outside meetings and in all dealings with the Government.

The first building that the Group undertook was the reconstruction of our Chapel which was sadly in need of repair. The annual rethatching of the roof was quite a costly affair and at first we thought only of tiling the roof. I was ready to give some money in memory of my parents and Sosamma Daniel wished to give some in memory of her husband, we collected also a few other donations and in the end we decided really to build a new Chapel on the foundation and using the tiled floor of the old Chapel. Arches were built to support a good timber roof, we added side verandahs and a porch and raised the east and west walls while leaving the side verandahs with only low walls. I went to look at some of the old churches and drew from them designs for the main cross and pinnacles on the west end and for a carved wooden cross over the porch.



P. K. Matthew acted as our architect and supervised all the building.

At last by November 20th 1948 all was ready, though we had a very busy time getting the final fittings done, putting in electric light, making a new altar cloth and new sanctuary curtains, getting the whole building whitewashed inside and out. But at last all was ready. The children looked so neat in their new school uniform, green skirts and white jackets and short white saris for the older ones and black ribbons at the end of long plaits since the little hair knots of older days had gone out of fashion.

We invited all the parents and Old Girls and many friends to the dedication ceremony of the Chapel which was performed by three members of our Governing Board belonging to three different Churches, the Rev. V. C. Gheevarghese, Jacobite, the Rev. V. M. Mathen, Mar Thoma, and the Rev. K. M. Mathen, Church of South India. Each of them took part of the prayers and one of them preached. Apparently it was a unique occasion for them to unite in a service. After the service some new clothes were given to the masons and carpenters who had been building the Chapel and all the workmen were given a meal. We gave our guests tea in the school garden and class rooms and the teachers and girls had got up an entertainment of dancing and acting.

The next morning the Holy Communion was celebrated in the Chapel by the C. S. I. pastor, followed by a celebration of the Qurbana.

When India became Independent in 1947, Sir C. P. Ramaswami Aiyar, who was the Diwan in Travancore, wanted Independence for the Princely States and announced that Travancore would not accede to the Indian Union but remain an independent separate State. However when he fell from power, Travancore acceded to the Indian Union and the first popular Government was formed. In the elections of February 1948 the Congress party won practically all the seats. In July 1949 Cochin State was integrated with Travancore to form the United Travancore Cochin State. The Government had been reformed more than once but the Congress party remained in power.

My first dealing with the Government was in connection with our School bus. We had been hiring a private bus to

bring our day girls from the College and from the town but the Government were now taking over most transport and in October 1949 our bus was no longer available. What should we do? Some of our day girls came to live in the School, some walked out from the town, some hired taxis. Mariamma went off to Trivandrum to see what could be arranged with the Minister of Transport but came back with nothing settled, so I thought I must go and see what I could do.

For the first time I flew down from Cochin to Trivandrum. I stayed at the hospitable Fern Hill Mission Bungalow. I spent a week touring the city on foot, by rickshaw, by bandy, visiting one official after another; everyone was most polite and friendly but passed me on to someone else. I saw the Assistant Inspector General of Police, the Government Secretary to the Transport Department, the Director of Transport, but the important Minister of Transport was away. At last I got a possible plan made with the helpful Director of Transport for a State bus to ply morning and evening between the College and our School. There remained only one difficulty, our School lay about a quarter of a mile off the main road along which the State buses ran, and in pouring rain it would be daunting for our girls to walk that distance and perhaps have to stand about waiting for the bus. It seemed possible that I might get permission for the bus to make a deviation up our side road but that would require the written order of the Minister of Transport. He was due to return to Trivandrum the next day. I secured an interview and put my case briefly saying all could be arranged but I needed his permission for this slight deviation. In a moment he had signed giving the permission and I returned triumphantly to the Director of Transport who assured me all was now well and I need wait in Trivandrum no longer, the necessary order would be forwarded to the Transport officer at Alwaye. But I, knowing the way of these offices, saw that that order under a pile of other orders might take weeks in getting through to Alwaye. I said, "I am in no hurry and can easily wait and take it myself." So I sat patiently on his verandah. Presently he looked out and invited me to come inside and sit under his fan. Then I heard him telephoning through to one of his clerks about speeding up the order and presently he handed it to me, the order for everything I could wish—the State bus to run daily at the hours we wanted coming right up to the School door and taking the girls at student concession rates, which were, I think, a little lower than the cost of the

charges on our private bus. Knowing that the Director was a Christian who would be familiar with his Bible, as he smiled at me for waiting so patiently, I remarked that I was like the Importunate Widow.

From that time on, the State Transport Office at Alwaye served us most obligingly, as the number of girls increased running more than one trip morning and evening and on the occasion of a Parents' Day putting on an extra bus late in the evening to take guests and girls home after an entertainment.

After this digression about the School bus, I must return to the Group. We were happy to welcome three new members.

Achamma Mathen, a sister of V. M. Ittyerah's, who had taken her degree at the Women's Christian College and her training at St. Christophers, had already taught for a year at the Mahilalayam, but had returned to the Bentinck School in Madras, where she had been previously teaching, to act as Vice-Principal and Principal. In 1951 we were able to persuade her to rejoin our staff and Group and to take over as Headmistress in 1953. She continued to hold this post till 1970. Achamma had a character of great uprightness and integrity, she was an excellent teacher, and a most able and conscientious administrator who devoted her whole time and energy to the School. We worked together most happily with great mutual affection.

When the Ittyerachs left the Union Christian College in 1955 to retire to their own house near Kottayam, they both continued as members of our Governing Board and Anna, as an Associate member of the Group, attended its meetings from time to time. We were happy to acquire a new member of the Group from the College side in Saramma Thommen, whose husband, an original member of the Settlement Fellowship, was now Warden of the Fellowship House. Saramma, a most sweet, devout and lovable person, was a valuable addition to our Group. After I left Alwaye she became Librarian. I had myself till then been responsible for all the English books in the Library and with the help of several Old Girls had spent much time in arranging the books in the beautiful new Library which A. A. Paul had given to the School in memory of his wife.

In 1957 we invited Rebecca Mathew to join the Group. She was an O. G. of the Mahilalayam who had taken her degree



at the U. C. College and we sent her to train at St. Christophers. She was a most unselfish and helpful member of the Group and a very useful Maths teacher, taking especial trouble to coach those girls who found that subject difficult. I came to know her best through Guiding. We were only able now to run one Girl Guide Company and for years Rebecca acted as Captain with some help from me and from various younger teachers. Later Chinnamma Mathai, wife of P. M. M., also joined the Group.

The Governing Board had entrusted the internal management of the School to the Group and this involved especially the upholding of the Christian ideals with which the School had been founded. We gradually formulated our Aims which were based on those of the Union Christian College Fellowship.

In these Aims we expressed our conviction that Christ had called us to work together for the School, relying on His never-failing love.

By the help of the Holy Spirit we aimed at doing God's Will in all aspects of our daily life and work.

We sought to commend Christ to our pupils.

We promised to support each other and to keep ourselves open to our Saviour's directions by the help of the Holy Spirit and to each other's suggestions especially in our mutual deliberations.

In order to keep these aims in mind we set aside one meeting each term to re-read them and to meditate on them, with penitence for past failure and a rededication of ourselves to the work to which Christ had called us.

## XIV

### SILVER JUBILEE

Already in June 1951 we were planning how to celebrate the Silver Jubilee of the School in 1952. At a Governing Board meeting, our Treasurer A. A. Paul proposed that we should raise a special Jubilee Fund of Rs. 50,000 in order to finish and improve all our school buildings. One of the Group protested that it was impossible to think of raising such a sum, but in the end we did very nearly collect that amount and were able to carry out all the building projects we had planned. We began making out a list of priorities, each project to be begun only when we had the money for it actually in hand.

The main School building needed plastering and proper shutters fixing to all the windows; a verandah on the east side of the building and a covered way from the class rooms to the dining hall were urgently needed, also a room where parents could wait and see children. A Sick Cottage or Sanatorium was essential and above all a complete sanitary system and a new water supply.

So we started collecting money. Mariamma Matthew and I became almost professional beggars. I remember well one of our first days of begging. We had some attractive illustrated leaflets printed and a special appeal leaflet in both English and Malayalam. We always sent these in advance to anyone on whom we intended to call. Dr. T. K. Verghese had already given Rs. 1000 towards our Sick Cottage and we intended to ask him for the further Rs. 4000 needed in order to build it. When we called on him I saw that he had a pile of bank notes on his table. After he had listened to my appeal he began handing me these notes one by one until he had given me the whole Rs. 4000. Imagine my delight! That day three other calls resulted in gifts of Rs. 500 from a parent, Rs. 1000 from another and Rs. 500 from a third. Our collecting days were not usually quite so successful as this but everywhere we met with much kindness and a ready response, and I was much

touched by the smaller gifts of those who had little to spare. A rickshaw cooli gave Mariamma 8 annas. One day a parent lent us his car to go round collecting from various houses and I gave his Moslem driver one of our leaflets to read while he was waiting. On our return we offered him a five rupee tip which he refused, saying we could give it to our fund.

As the money came in, P. K. Matthew began on the building operations and soon stones were being dug out of quarries round the hill and masons were at work building the verandah and Sick Cottage and then the octagonal Visitors Room, which was a special gift of all the Old Girls, logs were being sawn up to make shutters, for after twenty-one years the School building was really getting finished. In a letter of January 7th I wrote, 'P. K. Matthew is supervising the plasterers, who are then followed by the white-washers, then comes the Matron with a team of servants sweeping, cleaning and polishing. Mrs. Daniel has her account book balanced on a wall while she supervises one set of workmen and I am correcting a pile of exam papers while keeping an eye on a tailor making new curtains for the chapel.' For months I and the teachers had been rehearsing plays and dances for our entertainment. Finally we built a great *pandal*, an open-sided thatched hall, with a platform at one end and a seating capacity of about 1500. This was erected on the more or less flat hill top behind the Chapel.

Although the School was actually opened in May 1927 we decided to hold our day of celebration on January 26th when we could count on fine weather. As the doings of that happy day are fully recorded in the Jubilee Souvenir I will only write about them very briefly here. Our most honoured guest was Miss E. T. Stevens, the first Headmistress, who came to stay with us for several weeks. It was a delightful reunion with many of our Old Girls, of whom seventy were staying in the School from Friday onwards and over 200 with husbands and children were at lunch on the Saturday. The new Visitors Room was opened by Miss Stevens and the Sick Cottage by Miss Brockway. The guests so filled the Chapel for the Thanksgiving Service that our own girls had to stand outside.

At a grand public meeting in the *pandal* Miss Brockway, the Principal of St. Christopher's College where so many of our staff had trained, presided. Speeches were made by the President of our Governing Board, Mr. P. I. Korah, by Mr. C. P. Mathew, the Principal of the Union Christian College,





Rev. V. C. and  
Mrs. Elizabeth Gheevarghese



The Staff—1950



Sosamma Daniel  
and her niece Cicely



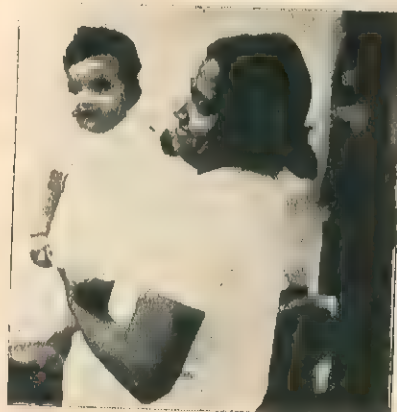
Miss E. T. Stevens on a Silver Jubilee  
visit—1952



Rev. K. C. and Anna Joseph and their Children



Hester Smith  
outside the Bungalow



Grace Thomas with Child



Miss Peyer with resident Group members



Achamma Mathen with her nieces Susy Mathew and Susan Ittyerah





Leisure Time  
(looking across the courtyard)

and an amusing account of her school days was given by Mrs. P. P. Joseph. Mrs. Ittyerah, secretary of the Jubilee Appeal Committee, was able to report that Rs. 17000 had already been collected. The *pandal* seemed completely full for the entertainment which followed after a break for tea. The chief items were "Shakuntala," a classic Indian drama, an English play "The Traveller's Shoes" and a Malayalam version of Tolstoi's story "What Men Live By." So many friends and workers at the School had contributed to make the occasion a great success.

Anna Joseph wrote in the Jubilee Souvenir, 'As an institution started on Indian initiative and struggling along on Indian resources with no endowments or reserve funds, Mahilalayam needs generous friends. She has had them in the past and if the Jubilee celebrations may be regarded as any indication, she will not lack them in the years to come.' Now that the celebration of the Golden Jubilee is approaching I can indeed say thankfully that during the past twenty-five years, by the blessing of God, the generosity of friends has never failed to support the School.

It was not until after the Jubilee that we heard the result of our appeal to the Commonwealth Education and Welfare Trust which each year makes grants to charitable institutions. We had applied for a grant of Rs. 12,000 after P. K. Matthew with the help of experienced engineers had made out detailed plans for a water supply and sanitary system, including a well in the valley with a pump house and electric pump to raise water to an overhead tank on top of the hill from which it could be distributed to a bath house and sets of latrines. Just before it was sent in, our engineers recalculated the cost and estimated that an extra Rs. 5000 would be needed but we added to our appeal that we would raise that extra money ourselves.

The grant had first to be passed by a committee in India and great was our delight when we heard that a grant of Rs. 12,000 had been recommended to the English committee and finally to our still greater satisfaction we heard that the English committee had sanctioned a grant of Rs. 17,000, the full amount needed to complete our whole water supply and sanitary system. Then indeed P. K. M. got busy, digging first the well in the valley which proved that it could yield an almost inexhaustible

water supply, laying pipes, building tank, bathrooms and latrines. I have a note in my diary that it was not until October 1954 that the first water came up the hill into the new overhead tank.

At a final Jubilee committee on December 4th 1954 it was reported that a sum of over Rs. 42,000 had been raised and all our projects had been completed and even exceeded, as in addition we had been able to build another Cottage Hostel, later named after me, the Hester Costiage.



## XV

### DOROTHY

Some of the Old Girls will well remember my sister Dorothy who visited the Mahilalayam in 1929 and taught us the English Country Dances, and all will be familiar with her name, as we have called one of the cottages after her. She had a lovable, courageous and enterprising character and was very fond of children and young people and they of her. So many of the sons of my parents' friends were killed during the first World War that I and my sisters remained unmarried; my youngest sister was for many years Bursar at Girton College, Cambridge, and Dorothy trained as a Social Worker but her bodily strength never matched her spirits and mental energy. As a child she was always the one of us to get ill. During World War I she joined the Women's Land Army and worked for a time on a farm milking the cows, and then, as a supervisor, went round on a motor cycle in all weathers to look after girls working on farms, which resulted for her in a severe attack of lumbago. Later as a social worker she was cycling about during a bus strike visiting School Health Centres and was laid up for weeks with sciatica. I was very anxious about leaving her when I first came out to India in 1927. When she visited me in India she got dengue fever. But all these setbacks never diminished her zest for life though her precarious health prevented her carrying on any regular social work. From India she went on to some friends in Kenya where the climate suited her but when she returned to England in 1933 she got very ill again; as I was there at that time I was able to nurse her after a serious operation.

During World War II Dorothy was in better health and worked at the Censor's Office in London. When I was invited to return to Alwaye in 1947 she seemed fairly well and was able to enjoy her flat at Gloucester Avenue where she entertained ever so many young people and was learning Braille in order to transcribe books for the Blind. She was always on the go and

spent much of her energy in helping an aunt, Lady Newbott, my mother's widowed sister. The aunt was over 80 and was in great difficulty, as a cousin with whom she was living had died and her only son's wife was dying of cancer. My sister went to live with her aunt for a time and then took her back to her own flat at Gloucester Avenue. But Dorothy picked up a bad germ which resulted in an attack of tonsillitis and weakened the muscles of her heart. In October 1949 to my dismay I had a cable from my sister Fay that Dorothy had had a heart attack. She was very ill and Fay was looking after her with the help of two nurses until I got back to England the following March and could take over the care of my now convalescent sister.

I saw that Dorothy needed some quiet occupation, and as she was a very good embroideress, I designed an altar cloth for our School Chapel with the flowers that grew in our garden or near by, and which we had chosen as the emblems of the Groups into which the Mahilalayam girls were divided, Marigold, Zinnia, Sunflower and Rose in the centre of a Cross, with Morning Glory, Moonflower, Hibiscus, Alamanda, Lily, Violet, Balsam, Jasmine and Lotus surrounding it. The Royal School of Needlework transferred my design to a linen cloth and mounted it on an embroidery frame. Dorothy began stitching the flowers using Anchor stranded cottons which are available in every colour. We spent many happy hours together choosing the exact shades for each flower and leaf. She did not finish the work till the following year after I had returned to India, but the Bealls who were returning to the U. C. College, brought it out in time to adorn our Chapel for the Silver Jubilee. In the Book of Exodus (39: 8-14) it is written that the High Priest Aaron had on his breastplate twelve precious stones representing the twelve tribes of Israel. So I thought our children should be represented on the altar by the flower emblems of their Groups. Dorothy's beautiful work was much admired especially by the children as they recognised their own flowers. It had been a great delight to my sister herself to accomplish this work.

For me it had been an agonising decision to know whether to stay in England to care for my sister or to return to Alwaye. She was much better by the autumn of 1950 and was very anxious that I should return to the Mahilalayam which I did. During the following year she was leading a fairly normal life, but was rather over-taxing her strength entertaining guests and

helping others when she really needed help herself. She continued to take a great interest in all my letters especially in news of our Silver Jubilee celebrations.

Alack, in June of that year she had another heart attack and a stroke which paralysed her left side. My sister Fay went to her at once and I longed to return to her, but she was in a very excitable nervous state, and the doctor advised me to postpone my coming as Fay was giving her every possible care with the help of a resident nurse. At last Fay cabled to me to come and for the first time I flew to England by air. I found my darling sister very ill but able to welcome me and hear about my flight.

We nursed Dorothy in her own flat with the help of day and night nurses but our beloved patient was gradually getting worse; her brain was affected and she lost the power of speech and hardly recognised us, but was just conscious when the priest brought her the Holy Communion for the last time. It was impossible that she should recover and when the end came very peacefully with her two sisters on either side of her bed, we could only thank God that she had been released from a tired worn-out body into a fuller life.

Dorothy died on October 11th 1952. I stayed on in England for over a year since she had left 35 Gloucester Avenue to me and as her executor I had many business affairs to settle. In the spring of 1953 I invited Mariamma Matthew to come and spend the summer months with me, leaving Sosamma Daniel to act as Headmistress.

I advised Mariamma to borrow some good dark silk saris as more suitable for the English climate and not needing frequent washing like the white khada cloth saris she usually wore. She arrived on June 11th looking as lovely as ever and delighting all she met by her charm. I took her to see all the sights of London and arranged for her to attend a Church Missionary Society Conference and to visit several schools, but I wanted her to enjoy herself. As I was driving Dorothy's little car, I was able to take her to see Winchester Cathedral and to stay with old Miss E. T. Stevens then living with a sister and a cousin in Hampshire, and to the West of England to stay with my sister and see Hereford Cathedral. I took her to Somerset to stay in an old English country cottage and also to



see some of the famous Oxford Colleges, and Jessie Chapman took her up to Scotland which she very much enjoyed.

After my sister's death I had wondered whether I should sell 35 Gloucester Avenue as I wanted to return to India. But just before Dorothy's last illness she had offered the Ground Floor Flat to our aunt Lady Newbolt, and she had come to live there with a housekeeper-companion. My cousins Geoffrey and Audrey Sheppard with their little boys Peter and Martin were living in the Garden flat, and Geoffrey suggested that I should let my flat furnished and he would look after the house for me while I returned to work at Alwaye. So Mariamma and I booked our passages for India in October. We first spent two nights in Switzerland staying in a Guest House near the Lake of Neuchatel where my old Swiss governess was living. We spent two days in Rome and took coach tours round that famous city. After another night in Naples, we embarked on a Lloyd Triestino boat for Bombay and were finally welcomed back at the Mahilalayam on November 16th. I heard that Mariamma had written wonderful letters describing all she had done and seen.

## XVI

### 'THE GIRLS' SETTLEMENT HOME

When I returned to Alwaye in 1947 I found that two cottages had been built by the Settlement on land adjoining our School. The larger one was built as a school house and a Primary School was opened; the second house was to be a hostel for girls. For some reason, permission to continue the Primary School was not given and before my return it had been closed, the girls had been moved to a house near the Boys' Settlement and only a Settlement worker, K. J. John and his family, were living near the Mahilalayam.

I visited the Settlement and was shown their weaving and carpentry sheds, but when I sat down with them to hear about their finances I found a very despondent fellowship. With the ending of the war, sales of furniture etc. had diminished, the support of English sponsors and Indian friends was not sufficient to meet their expenses; they were heavily in debt and saw no way to extricate themselves and to carry on the work they had so hopefully and courageously begun.

Then it was that Miss Knight, secretary to the English Alwaye Committee, met on board ship the secretary of the China Children's Fund which had recently been obliged to close all its orphanages in China. Miss Knight suggested that this Fund might take over the Alwaye Settlement and this is what most providentially was done. The C. C. F. (the Christian Children's Fund, as it was now called) sent out a Business Manager to put the finances of the Settlement on a sound footing and to pay off all their debts. First Mr. Scratch and then Mr. Henry, his wife and family, came and lived in one of the Settlement cottages which was adapted for their use, and I had much friendly intercourse with them. We were very pleased when it was decided to bring the girls back to the compound next to the Mahilalayam, the larger cottage was to house a Warden and the older girls, and the other cottage was

to be the home of the younger children and their Warden. So the GIRLS' SETTLEMENT HOME was opened in June 1951. The younger children attended the Thottumukhom Primary School but the older girls were to be pupils at the Mahilalayam. They adopted our School uniform, green skirts and white jackets, and every morning a little crocodile of small maidens were proceeding up our entrance drive to join our classes. We were very glad to welcome them, they joined of course in all games and sports and attended all our entertainments and we were invited to their Christmas play. On Sundays they came to our Chapel services and in the afternoon joined our Sunday School classes.

In 1956 when a new warden was needed for the Girls' Home, Mariamma Matthew offered herself for the post, as she and her husband lived in a house just opposite to the Girls' Home. We were very sorry to lose her as a Maths teacher though she would remain a member of the Group. But at the end of a year she felt it was difficult to combine the care of her home with the early morning and evening times when she was needed by the Settlement girls, and decided that her hours as a maths teacher fitted in better with her home life. An excellent Warden for the Girls' Home was presently found in Miss Rachel John. I took the greatest interest in the Settlement and I was especially concerned about the future of the girls when they left. The C. C. F. rule was that no boy or girl could stay on after reaching the age of 18, whether or not they had passed the School Leaving Certificate. Some of the girls who passed went on to College and we encouraged some of them to train as nurses. The money which the English Settlement Committee was subscribing was especially useful in helping some girls and a few boys to train when the C. C. F. was no longer available to help them.

The Settlement prospered with the generous support of the C. C. F. A beautiful chapel had been built in memory of Lester Hooper and by degrees a fine hall and other buildings were added, agricultural projects were developed, rice was grown and fruit and rubber trees were planted. When Mr. Henry left, C. I. Mathunni, a most able and devoted man who had been for years a member of the Alwaye Settlement Fellowship, was appointed as Business Manager. Our School had many links with the Settlement besides our close connection with the Girls' Home; one or other of the Settlement workers served on our



Governing Board and their daughters were pupils at the School.

The Union Christian College, the Settlement, the Rural Medical Mission and the Christava Mahilalayam all shared the same ideals of united Christian service and I am grateful that I was privileged to serve for so many years with such fine fellow workers.

## XVII

### LIVING ON A HILL TOP

Living on a hill top, constantly out of doors in daylight and dark, with wide unimpeded views over the countryside and of the vast over-arching dome of the sky, even indoors sitting on open verandahs or in rooms with no glass windows, I was more conscious of the waxing and waning moon, of sunrises and sunsets, of the changing seasons and of the fascinating bird and insect life, than in the much more shut in life of England.

The seasons on the West Coast of India might be divided into a Hot Dry Summer from January to May, followed by a Warm Wet Summer from June to the end of November and a short delicious Dewy Season in December and early January.

From the beginning of December, except for a few isolated storms, no rain fell till the monsoon broke at the end of May. From mid January onwards day by day the temperature rose, but even in April and May did not rise much above 103°F (38°C) or by night dropped little below 80°F (27°C). Signs of the awakening spring began early. Even in December the Cashew-nut trees were putting out fresh green shoots and sweet smelling clusters of little pink flowers. In January the young rubber trees, each at a different time, turned gold and brown, dropped all their leaves and after standing with bare branches for only a few days put out fresh buds, and drooping palmate leaves of tender green were soon spreading out their delicate fans. On the tall Silk Cotton trees enormous pink blossoms appeared, to be picked up by the road side, and later big pods of fluffy cotton would be gathered and pillows and mattresses stuffed. In the paddy fields the chanting of the coolis could be heard as they counted the buckets of water lifted to irrigate the fields by a curious contraption with weights at the end of one long arm to ease the raising of the full bucket at the end of the opposite arm. The fields were being ploughed while under water with small

wooden ploughs drawn by a pair of oxen. The red earth on the hilltop was daily getting hotter and drier and only some ferns in a few pots round my verandah could be kept watered, and the Morning Glory which grew over an arch outside my bathroom and benefitted from my bath water, continued each morning to delight me with a new garland of blue bells. But suddenly there would brew up a tremendous thunderstorm followed by a terrific downpour of rain and the thunder lilies were sending up a slender green stalk with two or three buds which opened out into big salmon pink flowers, the leaves only appearing later in the monsoon season. I had planted hundreds of these hardy bulbs under the trees and on either side of a long path in the front School garden and they were a lovely sight.

Travancore was a veritable paradise for birds with its diversity of terrain, high mountains and forests, low-lying plains, rivers and sea-board. In 1953 Salim Ali of the Bombay Natural History Society brought out a beautifully illustrated volume on "The Birds of Travancore and Cochin" and I could now identify all the birds on our hilltop and those I saw on my holidays in the Nilgiri and Palni hills. Early in the year it was pleasant to hear the little song of the Magpie Robins, one of the few really sweet bird songs, though there were plenty of musical calls and characteristic cries from the noisy squawks of the Seven Sisters as they flapped one after the other from bush to bush, and the scream, like the unwinding of a fishing line, from the great turquoise-blue white-breasted Kingfisher sitting on the top of a tree as he hunted for food on land as well as over ponds and ditches, to the liquid notes of the black-headed Golden Orioles flitting about in the mango trees. The tiny Sun-bird glistening with metallic purple hovered near the tall spikes of the Pagoda flowers or sipped honey from a crimson Hibiscus; a pair once built a hanging nest, with a little front door hooded by a minute porch under the eaves of my bungalow verandah. The birds I loved best were the Paradise Flycatchers, the male with his long floating white tail and the female with orange tail and back. As the temperature rose and, almost seeming to be a voice of complaint in the stifling heat, the Brainfever Bird began his repeated screams in aggravating crescendo, often by night as well as by day. In March came the Indian Cockoo with a distinctive cuckoo call of four notes and I found jokes were made about it just as about the English cuckoo.



Fortunately for teachers schools closed for two months during the hottest weather in April and May and I could escape to the hills and a climate like that of a cool English summer.

By the time I returned to Alwaye at the end of May the South West Monsoon would have broken and sheets of rain were drifting across the greening countryside as I travelled down the line from Shoranur. One year a great cyclone had swept over the hill top during my absence lifting the tiles off the roof of the Chapel verandah. We could not risk putting up any two-storied building on this exposed hill. Later Mr. Matthew learnt how to keep roof tiles in place with long strips of cement. I enjoyed the monsoon season because the great rains cooled the heated earth and the temperature dropped, though never below 75°F (24°C) even at night. The enormous clouds, their billowing masses often shot with lightning and sometimes looking like towering mountain ranges, were a grand sight and when a thunderstorm broke directly overhead, the noise was terrific. If you were out on the hill and heard the sound of a great approaching wind, you might just have time to run for shelter before the rain came sweeping down in great sheets. The tearing wind would have swept through the house and unless shutters and doors had been closed in time any unanchored papers would have been hurtled into the garden. One June I note that we had 20 inches of rain in ten days, six inches in one day. The gently flowing Periyar river rose to a raging torrent and flooded the surrounding land, and the riverside road from Alwaye was impassable by bus. If the road became submerged while our day girls were in School we would accompany them on foot to the edge of the flood and wade through the water till we could get boats to ferry them to higher ground. I enjoyed learning to balance in a little canoe and paddled myself about over the flooded fields.

Usually in August at the time of the Onam festival there was a break in the rains and the sun shone out on a sparkling green countryside with ferns and little flowers springing up on the banks and a thin green grass covering the bare hillside. Onam was a cheerful Hindu festival when women and children made patterns with flowers and coloured sands on the doorsteps and everyone feasted.

During the North-East monsoon in October and November the sun shone brilliantly in the mornings but it rained in the

evenings. The climate was at its most humid and sticky. Insect life abounded, mosquitoes, cockroaches and flying ants, on which I and the little gheekos on the walls waged a perpetual warfare, but the fireflies were a joy and the butterflies and moths. I had no knowledge of their names and could only wonder at the five-inch spread of wings with pale pink and green markings on a creamy surface, like fine feathers, of some visitor that strayed into my room.

From our hilltop we often saw marvellous double rainbows and I would take a class of children out to admire them after they had been learning:

"My heart leaps up when I behold.  
A rainbow in the sky."

Most magnificent of all were the sunrises and sunsets. I would wander out at dawn to see the whole eastern sky a glowing crimson until the sun rose a golden ball from behind the mountains and long fingers of light gradually stretched over the emerald paddy fields. I had two cement seats set on the hill one on the east, the other on the west side, to encourage the children to sit and admire the beauties of sky and earth round them and I would compare the colours of the clouds to the gay saris they loved, though those in the sky were a thousand times brighter. At sunset not only the western sky but all the clouds in the east were lit up, first flaming pink on their under surfaces then as the sun sank changing to deep delicate shades of mauve and purple while the light caught a higher layer of fluffy cloudlets changing them into floating pink flamingo feathers.

December brought some of the migrant birds on a brief stay for nearly the last of their halts on their long southern migration. The little greyheaded yellow wagtails sat twittering on the roofs, such tiny travellers after their immense journey from Siberia or even Northern Europe where they bred. The red-wattled lapwings were running about the hill and rising as you approached to utter their 'Peewit' cry so familiar to me from the plough fields round my home in Somerset. Salim Ali says they are resident but I never saw them except in mid winter. Now the great crimson Bougainvillea on my terrace was a glorious sight and the Rangoon Creeper emitted puffs of strong scent every evening to attract some long-tongued moth to visit its cluster of pink and white flowers. The scarlet

poinsettias glistened with dew drops in the early morning sunshine.

The night sky during the cloudless clear winter months was an awe-inspiring sight of magical beauty. As I walked up the path to take evening prayers in the Chapel, Orion rode in all his splendour above the roof and I could name all the great stars round him, Betelgeux on his shoulder and Rigel at his foot, Sirius and Procyon in the Great and Little Dogs and the Twins, Castor and Pollux. To the north prowled the great square of the Lion. The Polar star was so low on the northern horizon as to be barely discernable and the Great Bear performed strange antics revolving round it in a semi-circle so that it was often upside down. The southern circum-polar stars were rarely visible during the monsoon season and in the winter you had to get up in the late hours of the night to see the Southern Cross. I loved the starry moonless nights best of all but the phases of the moon and the times of its rising and setting became part of the rhythm of our daily lives. Sometimes I could almost feel the rotation of the earth as the constellations moved across the sky, as the station buildings seem to move when it is actually the train that has begun to gather speed.

I had various filmstrips of the moon and the stars which I used to show on the film strip projector and I made out and put up star maps. Then I would take the children out for them to learn to recognise some of the major constellations and even woke up some of the older girls at 5 a. m. one morning to see the Southern Cross.

To think about the immense size and number and the remoteness of the stars and the incredible distance of the galaxies increases one's sense of the greatness of God, the Lord of the Universe.



## XVIII

### AN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL

Up to the year 1951 the School was receiving only a small annual grant from the Government. In that year, chiefly due to the demands of teachers in Private Schools for an improvement in their emoluments, a new scheme was introduced by the Government. Under the Private Secondary School Scheme (the P. S. S. Scheme) Managements of Private Schools were to pay the school fees into the Treasury, retaining only a small amount for the Management to administer, and all teachers' salaries would be paid by the Government. After much consideration our Governing Board agreed to accede to this scheme which did bring much financial relief but, as I feared, would bring more restrictions to our freedom.

In 1956 the Central Government had reorganised the States into linguistic areas and the new State of Kerala was formed, comprising Cochin and Travancore except for a small Tamil-speaking area in the extreme south and including the Malayalam-speaking area of Malabar to the north. A Communist dominated Government came into power in the new Kerala State in 1957. Sri Joseph Mundaserry, the Minister for Education, sponsored a Kerala Education Bill which went much further than the P. S. S. Scheme. An order was passed that the full amount of the school fees must be paid into the Treasury. This would make the Managers of Private Schools little more than nominal owners of their schools.

We began to consider whether we should not withdraw from the P. S. S. Scheme and become an Independent School. During 1958 I record in my diary meetings with the Settlement School, also with the Nicholson and Balikamadam Schools to consider the future of our Schools. On October 22nd a deputation went to Trivandrum, Mr. C. I. Mathunni, the Settlement Business Manager, Miss Brookes-Smith of the Balikamadam, our President V. M. Ittyerah, Dr. K. C. Joseph

and myself to meet the Education Minister and put our proposals to him. Our main points were that we should as Independent Schools collect our own fees, appoint and pay our own staff and at the same time be Recognised Schools, following the State syllabuses and our pupils taking the State examinations. The Minister listened to our proposals most politely and I record in my diary that he said, "Yes, yes." I think I am right in saying that it was largely due to our efforts that the new Education Bill contained a section on Independent Recognised Schools, setting out the terms on which they could function and granting most of the freedoms for which we had asked.

If we applied to be an Independent School it would mean taking considerable risks. Would we be able to pay adequate salaries to our teachers and carry out the maintenance of the School with a limited increase of fees? The strength of the School had been growing, but would there be enough parents willing to pay our increased fees? However what was at stake was the very distinctive Christian character of the School and this could be preserved only if we had the freedom to appoint teachers who valued and would promote the Christian ideals of the School. In order to preserve these ideals the members of the Group who were full time teachers were willing themselves to accept lower salaries than those they had been receiving under the P. S. S. Scheme. On December 10th 1958 the Governing Board met and decided to apply for permission for the School to become an Independent Recognised School.

My little Corona typewriter, given me by my sister in 1933, was the only typewriter in the School, so it was I who typed out any important letters. I well remember how after I had typed out the application for the School to become independent, how frightened I felt. Were we taking too big a risk? But it was the decision of the Governing Board and of the Group made after much prayer and deliberation. The Nicholson and the Settlement Schools also applied to be independent and we had hoped that the Balikamadam and Baker Schools would also apply but their teachers felt that the risk was too great.

There were a number of Private Schools in Kerala, many of them under Roman Catholic Management and the new Education Bill was a serious threat to them. As a protest the

managers of the Private Schools refused to open their schools when the new school year was due to begin in June 1959. We faced a difficult decision. Some of the Board members were entirely opposed to any kind of strike by schools or teachers and considered that as we had applied to be independent there was no call for us to protest against restrictions in the Education Bill that did not affect us. Some members of the Board felt strongly that we should support the other Private Schools in their protest, by refusing to open our School. In the end we did decide that it was not safe to have our boarders back in such a disturbed time and so remained closed.

Pundit Nehru himself came to visit Kerala and the Central Government intervened on the ground that according to the Constitution Private Managements of whatever religion had a right to run their own schools. At last all schools opened on August 3rd. Though the Private School Managers had won certain concessions, there remained much in the Education Bill that would have hampered our freedom and we were glad that we had applied to run as an Independent Recognised School.

We had however many problems to face, the biggest of which was finance. The Governing Board decided to raise an Endowment Fund of One Lakh (Rs. 100,000) half of which I promised to raise in England, the other half was to be raised in India. The Church Missionary Society undertook to act as trustees for the English fund and with the help of their experienced financial advisers, were able to increase the original amount of capital I was able to collect, but the Indian contributions were slow to come in. It is to be hoped that with the Golden Jubilee of the School approaching, a renewed effort will be made to increase the Indian Endowment Fund.

P. K. Matthew also took steps to increase the income of the School by taking advantage of the Rubber Board's offer of grants towards replanting. Some rubber trees had been planted in early days on the slopes of our hill but they had been destroyed by intruding cattle and by injudicious tapping. Mr. Matthew secured a Rubber Board subsidy of some Rs. 7,000 and was able to replant 8 acres with rubber trees of good quality, and later 6 more acres were planted with a loan from the Rubber Board. When the trees were ready to be tapped our Office Manager, P. N. Ninan, the son of P. N. Ninan who



had been our Writer and Bursar for many years, got a proper building erected where the rubber could be processed, and arranged for the marketing of it.

Our fears that the parents would be unwilling to pay the increased fees that we had to charge and that consequently the number of our pupils would diminish, proved unfounded. Parents realised the good education and personal care our School provided and our numbers increased instead of dropping.

We were most anxious to continue to welcome girls from the neighbourhood whose parents could not pay our fees and decided to form a Scholarship Fund from which full or half fee concessions could be made, so we did not lack pupils. Neither have we lacked young teachers to join the staff, and to my joy several Old Girls have returned to serve their old School for longer or shorter periods.

## XIX

### AN ORDINARY DAY

I have written about various special events during my fifteen years as Principal but what remains in my mind most clearly is an ordinary uneventful school day.

At 6 o'clock the rising bell rang. After the silence of a devotional time for the boarders in Chapel, at 7 the Drill Mistress was blowing her whistle for exercises or games followed by a quarter of an hour of Group work. There was now only one Guide Company but the boarders were divided into Groups or little families of older and younger girls who carried out a rota of practical duties. The Sunflower Group would be fetching little hoes to work in the garden, while the Lily and the Marigold and other Group leaders were doling out little twigged brushes for sweeping the Chapel, the cottages, class rooms and the compound. I would wander round from Group to Group, encouraging the gardeners to water the pot plants or spotting paper that had not been picked up on the playing field. The breakfast bell brought a scurry to wash hands and to get seated in the dining room where the Balsam Group on mess duty had already begun to serve the food.

Day girls arriving on foot or by bus soon after 9 joined in a short service in Chapel or a prayer in the hall. A Scripture lesson preceded the 10 o'clock Roll Call. I had written notes to help the teachers with a carefully planned course of Bible lessons. Moral Instruction classes were also held for those who did not attend the Scripture lessons.

From 10—1 and 2—4 the classes followed the State syllabuses. I supervised all the English teaching, taking some of the set texts and compositions in the higher standards myself. I remember especially enjoying selections from Pandit Nehru's Letters which Standard X were studying and helping the girls to get some idea of Wordsworth's daffodils or to appreciate the

rhyme and rhythm in English poetry. I took some conversation lessons with all standards, and had great fun with the beginners, holding my classes chiefly out-of-doors with many repetitions of, "I am running round the tree" and "I am walking up the steps." The first English sentence that the children often said to me was, "I see a cow in the garden," followed by swift action to expel it.

There was only too short a time after 4 o'clock for games or a Guide meeting before the bus arrived to carry the Day Girls away. Then while some of the boarders were bathing or sitting chatting on the hill, I took those who wanted to swim to bathe in the river. We undressed on the sandy banks and swam in clear warm water which during the winter months was only shoulder deep at the centre of the river. I had started a Swimming Club and to join the Club and gain the Club certificate a girl had to swim 50 yards along a measured rope. She could go on to gain a First Class Certificate when she could swim in good style front and back stroke, float and surface dive. There were always a number of little girls who wanted to learn to swim and they could gain a preliminary certificate when they could swim 10 yards. Once a year we held Swimming Sports of which the chief event was an Inter-Group Relay Race.

Some evenings I went visiting the homes of our Day Girls. They were a very important part of the School as more than half our pupils came from the College side, from the town or from the immediate neighbourhood. All the daughters of the College and Settlement staff as well as some of their little sons were pupils at the Mahilalayam. A wealthy Moslem, Mr. Makkarpillai, sent in turn nine of his daughters to be educated at our School and later, 24 of his grand-daughters and I have lost count of how many of his great-grand-daughters and sons came as pupils. I remember once looking at a little ring of dancers to whom I was teaching the English Country dances. Some of them were Christians (both Syrians and from the Backward Classes), some were High Class Hindus, others Moslems. I reflected how easily children of all creeds and castes could join hands together in a happy school community.

When I planned to go house visiting I would choose a locality to be reached on foot or by bus and ask one of the girls from that district to take me to her home and then conduct



me to the home of a neighbouring girl and so on. The class teacher of one of the girls would come with me and talk with the women folk while I talked to the father or brother who spoke English. Our visits were made just for the friendly purpose of meeting our pupils' relations and seeing them in their homes. Everywhere we were most hospitably received. We found much kindness and love in the homes but not always so much wisdom. For instance one girl was being urged to sit up late at night and to rise before dawn in order to study before an examination, with the result that in School she was unable to concentrate during her lessons. I waged a perpetual war against too long hours of study, and saw that at least our boarders always had adequate hours of sleep especially before examinations. I know I learnt a great deal from these visits about the homes of our Day Girls and I think the teacher who came with me did too and this enabled us better to understand and help our pupils.

All too soon the sun was setting and the swift dusk falling. The boarders went to their class rooms to study and I would have a bath and change into a cool cotton sari before going up to the Chapel to take evening prayers with those of the staff who liked to come. I hurried back then to my own supper while the children had theirs. Between 8 and 9, as in the early days, the children came to me for reading and games. But now with nearly 200 boarders, I could only have each class once a fortnight in two half-hour periods, the younger ones during the first half hour. A rush of little feet would patter down my garden path and soon mats were set in a semi-circle on the floor of my sitting room. I tried to make this time an occasion for some English conversation and we played every kind of game that introduced at least a few English words such as, "Cobbler, cobbler, mend my shoe" and a simple form of 'Twenty Questions.' Sometimes I would tell stories about my own childhood or my life in England. There was always much laughter and merriment. I know that for some of the Old Girls the most memorable hours of school life were those evenings of fun and games in my bungalow.

## XX

### FAREWELL

When I returned to join the Group in 1947 I thought I could give at least two years service to the school, but I stayed for fifteen years. I have written nothing about the changes I observed in an Independent India.

We celebrated each year Republic Day on January 26 and Independence Day on August 15 with a school holiday and the hoisting by a Girl Guide Colour Party of the Indian Flag on the new flagstaff in our front garden. We had a holiday also on October 2 in memory of Gandhiji. The chief changes that I personally noted in our neighbourhood were the improved irrigation schemes which enabled more crops to be grown in the paddy fields, and the growth of factories in the district between Alwaye and Ernakulam. At least one member of the poor families living round our hill might now get regular employment instead of the whole family being dependent on casual seasonal field labour. Alwaye had grown from a small market town into a good shopping centre; the narrow gauge railway line from Shoranur had been converted into broad gauge and had been extended south; a big Bus Station ran buses to all parts and the fine bridge over the Periyar meant no long delays, as in previous days, in crossing the river by ferry. Kerala had abandoned the old Travancore coinage, calendar and Anchet Post and we all set our watches and clocks by the radio All India time.

Since the Inauguration of the Church of South India, there were at first few changes at the Alwaye Anglican Church, but by degrees the new liturgy and the new Confirmation service were introduced. In our School Chapel the C. S. I. Pastor used the new liturgy when he took the service once a month. At Kodaikanal I was able to enjoy fellowship with all C. S. I. members.

It was chiefly in the position of women that changes had gradually come. Now only the older women still wore the traditional white skirts and short *kavanis*. All the younger women had adopted many coloured long saris and wore them in the most fashionable way, and very lovely they looked in their best silks and nylons on an Old Girls' Day. A girl who was formerly married when very young after a limited education and who spent most of her day in the kitchen or caring for her children, was now generally not married till she had completed her High School course or even until she had graduated. After her marriage she often continued her career as doctor or teacher and combined this with her life as wife and mother. No longer did she wait on her menfolk at meals and eat afterwards, but, though she might have cooked and served the food, she sat down at table with the rest of the family. She had not lost her gracious manners or her unselfish spirit of devotion but had acquired a new dignity and competence.

I decided that it was time I should retire in 1962. As I walked round the School compound before I left, I saw a ring of cottages round the hill, built by the generous gifts of many donors, on the south side the Sanatorium and the Dorothy Cottage and on the north the Hester and Sally Cottages. (The Christine Cottage was not built till 1964). Our Chapel in the centre was surrounded by shady mango trees. On the north side of the main building was the library given by Mr. A. A. Paul. A fine new dining room near the kitchen was later on extended to provide seating at meals for all the staff and boarders. From the old deep well the waterman still drew pure drinking water, while the new electric pump in the valley raised water to the top of the hill for bathing and all other purposes.

But far more important than the buildings were the children and teachers who lived in them. It has not been possible for me to write individually about the many girls and a few little boys whom I taught and played with and loved during these fifteen years. After leaving School the Old Girls would return as College students and later bring their husbands and children to visit their old School and finally send their daughters to be educated at the Mahilalayam.

Our Old Girls were the greatest possible help to the School. They responded to every appeal for money and helped in many



other ways, with the Library and with the Old Girls' Association, and some of them came back as teachers. I remember especially those who came back to teach as well as other young teachers who came to serve the School for shorter or longer periods. They not only carried out their set teaching duties but helped with games and sports, swimming and gardening and getting up entertainments. They took an active part in the religious life of the School, taking Scripture lessons, leading early morning devotions and prayers, taking Sunday classes and a Sunday Evening Service. They joined in all the social life so cheerfully and enthusiastically and by their friendly relation with all the children, made the School the happy place to which many Old Girls look back with gratitude.

I had fortunately met in 1961 Miss Christine Peyer whose four year term as a lecturer at St. Christophers Training College was ending the following year. I invited her to visit the Mahilalayam and as she liked the School, and everyone liked her, we were delighted when she consented to join the staff for two years on an honorary basis when I left in 1962. She was a most charming person and an experienced English teacher with an Oxford Honours Degree. She finally stayed for five years. She helped Miss Brookes-Smith in writing English Text Books for the State, and must have been the greatest help to our girls in attaining a high standard of English. Christine joined the Group and took an active share in all the extra curricular activities, and I was especially pleased that, as she enjoyed swimming, she took over the running of the Swimming Club.

When I left after many farewell meetings and receiving many loving gifts, I felt that I was leaving a most competent staff to carry on the School. There was Achamma Mathen, a very capable and most devoted Headmistress. Sosamma Daniel was the Bursar with P. N. Ninan as Office Assistant helping with the daily keeping of the accounts. Sosamma Chandy, who in early days had been our Music teacher, was now the Matron. Mariamma Matthew, the Senior Maths teacher, was one of the most valued and inspiring Group members. Elizabeth Gheevarghese taught Biology and also cared most lovingly for any sick children. To my great delight there were ten Old Girls who had come back to teach, Rebecca T. Matthew, Maths teacher and Captain of the Girl Guide Company; K. J. Rachel, Senior History teacher; Susie Mathew, Omana Thomas, Elmi

Abraham, K. M. Annakutty, Susy Joseph and T. C. Mariamma, for so many years our valuable and skilled Needlework teacher, who had not only taken her classes so efficiently but had interested the girls in embroidery and dress-making, so producing many pretty and useful articles for all our sales.

Three Group members were coming over for the weekly Group meetings, Saramma Thommen who was taking over as Librarian, Grace Thomas one of the founders of the Group who was doing some English teaching, and Chinnamma Mathai, wife of Dr. P. M. Mathai, who came to live at the School while her husband was in Nigeria, and must have been a very helpful addition to the staff.

Lastly there was the faithful P. K. Matthew walking almost daily round the compound keeping an eye on buildings and plantations. He was Secretary to the Governing Board of which V. M. Ittyerah had for many years been our most valued President. All the Board Members had at heart the ideals for which the Christava Mahilalayam stood as an Independent Union Christian School.

So I said farewell to the beloved School where I had spent so many happy, as well as some sad and anxious, days. It had been a great privilege to work all these years with such dear and good colleagues and we could indeed thank God for having belssed our labours.



## EPILOGUE

It was by no means a final farewell that I said to the School in 1962 for since then I have paid three winter visits to Alwaye and on each occasion many of my Old Girls and other friends came to see me. In 1964 I made a tour to Bangalore, Mysore, Vellore and Madras visiting the Old Girls in each place. I could indeed be proud of them—there were doctors and college lecturers, headmistresses and teachers, some holding Government posts and many of them combining a professional career with marriage. Among our Old Boys were doctors, engineers, business magnates and Government officials.

In 1965 came the very sad news of the death of Mariamma Matthew, and on my second visit my dear friend was no longer there to welcome me. In 1966 P. K. Matthew and I carried out our long-planned extension of the Chapel, opening up the arch which had been built into the east wall and adding a sanctuary with side chapel and extended vestry. On Parents' Day 1969 I was able to share in the functions on the occasion of the opening of the new Mariamma Matthew Memorial Hall, built by the gifts of many friends and by a grant from the Commonwealth Education and Welfare Trust, the construction work having been largely carried out under the skilful supervision of P. N. Ninan.

Apart from these winter visits, I have kept in close touch with the School by correspondence. I was happy to hear that Mary Oommen and K. J. Rachel had joined the Group (and later also Leelamma Abraham) and that Mary Oommen was appointed Headmistress when Achamma Mathen retired in 1970.

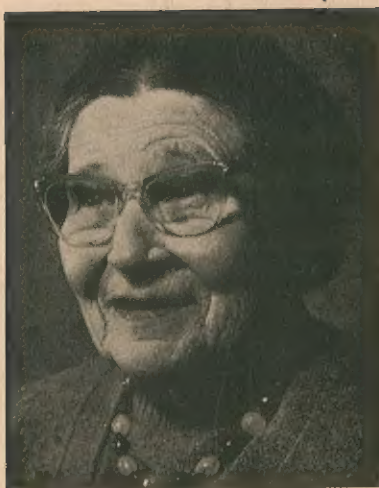
At my flat in Gloucester Avenue I was able to welcome my Old Pupils who came for a holiday or for a longer stay in England. One of my first visitors when I retired was K. M. Saramma who came as a pupil to the Mahilalayam in 1929. Anna Thomas was a frequent visitor while she was studying for



her Doctorate at Keele University, and I attended her wedding to Brian Betts. It was a great pleasure to have Anna Joseph for several weeks while she was taking an Advanced Course on English Teaching, and Dr. John Daniel and his wife Chinnamma while she was on a Medical Course. I was delighted to have two of my early pupils, M. J. Baby now Mrs. Kurien, and M. V. Thangamma, now Mrs. Jacob, and their husbands, to stay for a few days on a sight-seeing tour of London. Others have called to see me while passing through London on their way to or from America.

I heard our present Archbishop of Canterbury, speaking on the Television in his inaugural sermon, say that we should stretch 'arms of love right round the world,' and I thought that was just what I was doing when I remembered the dear faces of my children in Canada and in the U. S. A. in Hong Kong and in Australia, in all parts of India, in the Arabian Gulf and in Africa, and was receiving loving letters from all parts of the world.

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Hester Smith